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## Indisciplined Ceramic Outhouses and Blob-like Glass Bunnies: Four Case Studies on Canadian Prairie Ceramics and Glass

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree  
in Art and Visual Culture

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## Abstract

The field of craft has been dominated by debates surrounding types of objects and material, how-tos, lists, and genealogies, and today there is an increasing turn towards craft theories which do not necessarily address an object. This study brings the object back into craft discourse. “Indisciplined Ceramic Outhouses and Blob-like Glass Bunnies: Four Case Studies on Canadian Prairie Ceramics and Glass” is an object-inspired study of the work and craft-related practices of Victor Cicansky (Saskatchewan), Ione Thorkelsson (Manitoba), Marty Kaufman (Alberta), Altaglass (Alberta), and Mireille Perron (Alberta).

Part one of this dissertation focuses on Cicansky and part two focuses on glass. The second chapter in each part is a resonant response to the first. Chapter one spans Cicansky’s career. Through selected objects and metaphors, it argues Cicansky has always been and continues to be a materially driven craftsperson. Chapter two begins with an absent object and investigates the contributing role of the domestic towards its absence which in turn reframes the understandings of a number of Cicansky’s early ceramic works. In the third chapter, Roger Caillois’ theory of vertiginous play is used to investigate why studio glass blowing developed when it did on the Prairies. This chapter also questions and problematizes the division between studio- and factory-blown glass. The final chapter examines Perron’s exhibition *The Anatomy of a Glass Menagerie: Altaglass* (Nickle Galleries, Calgary, AB, 2019) in relation to chapter three’s discussions on vertiginous play and to Koen Vanderstukken’s writings on glass and virtuality.

Jules David Prown’s methodological approach to the study of objects—a hybrid of material culture and art history—grounds this study and each object-inspired chapter. Informed by material culture studies and craft theory, the four chapters each adopt an indisciplined line of inquiry by focusing on specific objects, materials, and processes and their associated imposed limits in the context of the rich history of craft, ceramics, and glass. This study provides a framework for examining Prairie craft that moves beyond biography, genealogy, art history, and how-to descriptions as it is discipline specific and object-inspired.

## **Keywords**

craft, Prairie craft, Canadian craft, ceramics, craft theory, glassblowing, studio glass, factory glass, indisciplined approach, object-inspired, material culture, virtuality,ilinx, vertiginous play, Altaglass, Victor Cicansky, Ione Thorkelsson, Marty Kaufman, Mireille Perron

## Summary for Lay Audience

In the 1970s in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, ramshackle miniature ceramic outhouses started appearing in group exhibitions and blob-like glass bunnies occupied countless coffee tables. The raucous ceramic sculptures populated with donkeys, food, classical figures, and local characters broke so many of the “rules” associated with well made pottery and ceramics while the kitschy, somewhat old fashioned glass knickknacks were nothing like the spontaneous, organic-looking glass objects coming out of university ceramic departments and newly established glass blowing studios such Ione Thorkelsson’s studio in southern Manitoba. The outhouses were sculpted by Regina Clay ceramist Victor Cicansky who had recently returned to Saskatchewan after completing graduate work at the University of California, Davis, and the glass bunnies were made by the Medicine Hat, Alberta company Altaglass. “Indisciplined Ceramic Outhouses and Blob-like Glass Bunnies: Four Case Studies on Canadian Prairie Ceramics and Glass” closely examines these curious objects and culturally and historically situates them within Canadian craft discourse.

This study examines the work and craft-related practices of Altaglass, Cicansky, Marty Kaufman (Alberta), Mireille Perron (Alberta) and Thorkelsson. Part one reframes Cicansky’s entire career in relation to craft’s ever-evolving definition and argues the importance of the domestic to his early ceramic work. The second part of this dissertation proposes a way to study and approach the history of studio glass blowing that is grounded in the act of blowing itself. This approach makes room for both factory- and studio-made glass within the history of Prairie craft. Objects are brought back into these discourses and histories, and this study provides a framework for examining Prairie craft that moves beyond biography, genealogy, art history, and how-to descriptions as it is discipline specific and object-inspired.

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## Introduction

“Wonder is something like fear in its effect on the heart.”<sup>1</sup>

– *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* by Albert the Great

### Wonderous Crumpled Paper and Pickled Eggs

It is a vivid memory—if there is such a thing—combining smell and sense of being too small, too short, and too low to the ground. The curious object was out of reach, but if I craned my neck up to the ceiling, I could see a gallon jar of ceramic pickled eggs nestled into the bookshelf. At the time, my ten-year-old self interpreted its function to be akin to an unusual bookend but in retrospect, I don’t think it was holding up any books; it was just nestled into a niche-like void in a jam-packed floor to ceiling bookcase.

Exploring the local used bookstore was a regular family affair. The weekends when we stayed with my father were filled with swimming, tower bell ringing, videogame playing, documentary watching (we could only start a new release Hollywood film if we first watched at least 45 minutes of a documentary), and used bookstore perusing. Swimming involved the smell of chlorine, and like the old-style chlorinated pools that filled the dimly lit change-rooms, lobbies, and viewing galleries with a smell I still love to this day, entering a used bookstore involved the same sensorial delights. As we followed my father into one of our favourite stores on 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Regina, Saskatchewan, a rush of used bookstore air would fill my nose, sending an immediate signal to my brain that for the next hour or so we would be allowed to roam the bookstore freely in search of new books for our collections. A good used bookstore has a unique smell, the result of hundreds of old books crammed into a small space — dry like fall leaves and musty like the object is in desperate need of fresh air, but with that release comes the pregnant rheumy narratives of a variety of histories.

The bookstore was owned by Richard Spafford, a prominent collector and supporter of the arts in Regina, and he displayed selections from his Saskatchewan art collection in the store. I clearly remember two ceramic objects within the bookstore: one was unbelievably delicate object of crumpled paper under glass and the other was the pickled eggs way up on that bookshelf. Was I peering down curiously into the vitrine trying to figure out why these crumpled pieces of paper were under glass? Did I step up

on a stool to peer down? Were they even under glass? Was it my curiosity that caused Richard Spafford to explain to me they were actually ceramic? Or were they not even under glass, and I got a little too close, causing Spafford to come over to tell me about them while also ensuring their safety. Whatever the case may be, those trompe l'oeil ceramic objects crafted to look like crumpled balls of paper (which I now suspect, if they even ever existed, to be the work of Karen Dahl) created within me a sense of wonder, not so much for the artist but for the material and the metonymic possibilities of ceramics. The other was that wonderous mason jar of eggs, so high up and out of reach—straining to see it made me feel even smaller than I was, and the ceramic sculpture occupied a god-like position up within the clouds of books filled with wonderous narratives, knowledge, and history.

Literary historian and author Stephen Greenblatt defines wonder “as the power of the object displayed to stop the viewer in his tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention.”<sup>2</sup> It also involves a specific type of “enchanted” looking: “Looking may be called enchanted when the act of attention draws around itself a circle from which everything but the object is excluded, when intensity of regard blocks out all circumambient images and stills all murmuring voices.”<sup>3</sup> Those ceramic bookstore objects—the crumpled paper and gallon of pickled eggs—were wonderous things, so wonderous they were etched into my memory. I might not remember specific details about the books I bought, but I certainly remember specific details and feelings about those two objects.

I credit these childhood moments of wonderous enchanted looking with building the foundation for my interest in Prairie craft and especially with my love affair for Saskatchewan ceramics. This, in turn, has led to a decades-long resonant relationship with a number of these objects including that curious ceramic object nestled high on a used bookshelf: Spafford donated *Pickled Eggs*, 1980 (fig. 1) by Regina ceramist Victor Cicansky to the Moose Jaw Museum & Art Gallery, and as an adult, I have had the privilege to touch it and look at it up close. As a child, I never noticed it had real peppercorns adhered between the eggs, and its crazed surface rivals, for me, any Southern Song Guan Ware surface.<sup>4</sup> It was all about wonder when it lived in the bookstore, but now that it is in a museum, it resonantly speaks to me—we have a resonant relationship.



**Figure 1** Victor Cicansky, *Pickled Eggs*, 1980. Earthenware, glaze, lustre, peppercorns, 23.9 x 16.4 x 15.4 cm. Collection: Moose Jaw Museum & Art Gallery. Donated by Richard Spafford, A.20.06.10.6. Photo: Don Hall, Mackenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

This dissertation is a record of my ongoing resonant relationship with a number of crafted objects. It examines the work and craft-related practice of Cicansky and specific examples of glassblowing in the Prairie provinces including the work of Ione Thorkelsson (Manitoba), Marty Kaufman (Alberta), Altaglass, and Mireille Perron (Alberta). Informed by the scholarly work of Jules David Prown, W.J.T. Mitchell, material culture studies, and craft theory, the four chapters each adopt an indisciplined line of inquiry by focusing on specific objects, materials, processes, and their associated imposed limits in the context of the rich history of craft, ceramics, and glass. Objects are brought back into these discourses and histories, and through its discipline-specific and object-inspired approach, this study provides a framework for examining Prairie craft that moves beyond biography, genealogy, art history, and how-to descriptions.

What do I mean by a resonant relationship? Can someone have a relationship with an object? Yes, they can, and this dissertation is proof of that. According to Greenblatt, a resonant exhibition or object has the power to pull “the viewer away from the celebration of isolated objects and towards a series of implied, only half visible relationships and questions...[and] to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged.”<sup>5</sup> For me, a resonant relationship is one where a wondrous object fosters a desire to learn more and feel more; it has the ability to make one’s world bigger. A resonant relationship does all this but is also a dialogue between object, history,

community, and researcher, which often starts with a wonderful encounter, and grows into a long-term relationship.

Historian Ruth Goodman opens her book *How to be a Victorian* with “I want to explore a more intimate, personal and physical sort of history, a history from the inside out.”<sup>6</sup> I too want to explore a more intimate and personal form of history, and this dissertation is one way of doing that, of taking my resonant relationship with specific crafted objects and makers to a new level, a level that is informed by craft and disciplinary knowledge. In 2006, I completed my Master of Arts thesis “Prairie Pots and Beyond: An Examination of Saskatchewan Ceramics from the 1960s to Present” where I set out to resonantly engage with my past through specific objects and makers, to lay the groundwork for an inventory of contemporary ceramists in Saskatchewan (yes...a canon of sorts), and to “insert part of Saskatchewan’s culture into Canadian art history.”<sup>7</sup> In part, this was in response to ceramic critic and theorist Garth Clark who explained in “Voulkos’ Dilemma: Toward a Ceramic Canon,” that without an inventory (a canon, but not a fixed list, more of a discursive starting point), it is next to impossible for one to write and/or critically engage with the field of ceramics.<sup>8</sup> I argued that an inventory of Saskatchewan ceramists was needed for the same reason, and I attempted to create a balanced approach to each object and maker by touching on the biographical, technical, and theoretical. This was the first step in my ongoing resonant relationship with objects such as *Pickled Eggs* and its maker, Victor Cicansky.

Although this was an important step in terms of the developing resonant relationship I have had with this particular subject matter, the inventory exercise of “Prairie Pots and Beyond” has been just that, a stepping-stone. It falls in line with a number of other contemporaneous projects such as Gail Crawford’s encyclopaedic study *Studio Ceramics in Canada* or art gallery-driven exhibitions such as *On the Table: 100 Years of Functional Ceramics in Canada* (Gardiner Museum, Toronto, ON) and *Regina Clay: Worlds in the Making* (MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK) which all adeptly inventory and canonize a specific aspect of historical Canadian ceramics.<sup>9</sup> There are also numerous historical examples such as the Alberta Art Foundation’s *Studio Ceramics in Alberta* series, which provide a useful snapshot of studio ceramic activities in Alberta from 1947 to 1984.<sup>10</sup> While these inventory projects are an important part of a resonant



relationship, they do pose a danger as they can give the impression the work of recording, synthesizing, and engaging with the material has been done, when in fact these projects should be seen as the first incomplete steps. Putting together an inventory requires a lot of effort, but the detailed examination of individual objects is often missing. On the surface, it might appear as though the history of Canadian ceramics has been told numerous times already through the projects listed above, but these projects have generally not closely examined individual objects as they are concerned with bigger pictures and the relationships between multiple individuals. In addition, more often than not—and this is the case with “Prairie Pots and Beyond”—the inventorying/canonization and theoretical underpinnings are bolstered by the art world and art theory, pushing craft theory and knowledge and specific disciplinary perspectives and histories to the side.

This dissertation aims to take up the resonant relationship I have with Prairie craft, to explore the subject in a more intimate and personal way while also bringing craft theory and material culture into the mix. The term “Prairie” encompasses work made in the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and throughout this collection of essays, you will notice I often capitalize “Prairie.” This is purposeful. Canadian poet and educator Alison Calder recounts in her essay “Sense and Place,” that when explorers and traders came to the prairie (Calder differentiates between “Prairie” as concept and “prairie” as environment), the Prairie eye imposed on the land “saw a lot of not: not-trees, not-mountains, not-people. Being Prairie means not-seeing, willfully.”<sup>11</sup> She explains that “Prairie” is a colonial concept developed by Europeans, which is framed through an agenda of resource development.<sup>12</sup> Calder urges the reader to counter Prairie seeing and thought through empathy, which means taking a broader and deeper view: “Being here in a useful way means getting below the surface of common sense. It means having a deep understanding of where one is, not only in individual terms, but in terms of larger political, historical, and environmental movements.”<sup>13</sup> Author Margaret Atwood discusses in “Canadian Monsters,” how Gwendolyn MacEwen’s (1941–1987) “Noman’s land” (which is Mackenzie King’s artificial ruins at Kingsmere) is a place of time-travel, “a doorway between the past and the future: ‘...a tension so real it’s almost tangible; it lives in the stone, it crackles like electricity among the leaves.’”<sup>14</sup> Many of the objects included in this dissertation, including *Pickled Eggs*, have caused me to feel that same

electrical sensation and to seek out a deeper understanding of the connection between past, present, and future in order to come to an understanding of what Prairie craft entails. To find these doorways between different moments in time is to physically discover things otherwise left for dead or suppressed in favour of more dominant narratives.

These electrical moments have inspired me to create an indisciplined, object-inspired approach for studying selected examples of Canadian Prairie craft: the work of Victor Cicansky and Alberta glass. With this dissertation, my goal was not to create a grandiose tool for studying craft in general, nor was it to enshrine a particular canon of Prairie craft. Instead, it is about playing around with resonant ideas, my own electrical wonderous and resonant memories, and thinking deeply about a particular subject or problem. It is also about suggesting methodologies and approaches for engaging with craft that are material-, field-, discipline-, and craft-centric.<sup>15</sup> Although the integrated articles included here can stand alone, a focus on objects, craft, a connection to the Canadian Prairies and a methodological approach to objects advocated for by the art historian and material culturist Jules David Prown connects the four chapters.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the four chapters can be divided into two parts where chapter two is a resonant response to chapter one, and chapter four is a resonant response to chapter three, demonstrating how this type of engagement can and should lead to even more discourse. It is all about stepping-stones which lead back to those wonderous encounters of enchanted looking in a used bookstore on 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Regina.

To briefly summarize this dissertation, chapter one, “Of Thread and Branches: Victor Cicansky’s Crafted Path,” retrospectively re-examines Cicansky’s practice from its beginnings in the late 1960s until now. I specifically discuss key examples of his work, including ceramic pots, clothing, and furniture and bronze tables and benches in relation to craft and its ever-evolving definition. Chapter two, “Potted Plants and Wallpaper: Victor Cicansky’s Turn to the Domestic,” is a critical response to chapter one where I think through and hypothesize the contributing causes surrounding the absence of an entire series of work, the *Wallpaper Flowers* series. The series is comprised of trompe l’oeil pieces of wallpapered walls planted in terracotta pots, and the subsequent research surrounding the history of wallpaper and potted plants, led me to realize the importance of the domestic for Cicansky during the 1970s.<sup>17</sup> This realization has framed and

expanded my understanding of his ceramic clothing and preserves in a new light, and I intend to use this Prownian-inspired methodology in my future research and curatorial projects. The second half of the dissertation shifts to glass as chapter three, “Shattering the Canon and Spinning a Discourse: Playing with Early Prairie Glass,” proposes a material- and process-inspired way to approach and understand glass and glass’ history within the Prairie provinces. I focus on a film featuring the Calgary glass blower Marty Kaufman at work in the hotshop at the Alberta College of Art and examine early examples of studio glass by makers such as Ione Thorkelsson from Manitoba in relation to glass objects blown at Altaglass in Medicine Hat. I question the division between factory- and studio-made glass and propose that Roger Caillois’ theory ofilinx-related play can be used to study all types of glass.<sup>18</sup> I close by suggesting early studio glass can benefit from design history as I compare these early glass objects to the notion of the blobject, an aesthetic articulated by design curators Steve Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov.<sup>19</sup> Chapter four, “Narratives of a Reflective Virtuality: Re-activating Altaglass’ Menagerie,” applies the material- and process-inspired approach articulated in chapter three to a contemporary exhibition and project by Mireille Perron of Calgary where she created cyanotypes of pieces of Altaglass. Perron’s project was driven by a desire to reactivate the history of Altaglass and a particular collection of the factory’s output.<sup>20</sup> Drawing on the research undertaken in chapter three, I examine how Perron’s project troubles the boundaries between past and present and between factory and studio glass. Like Kaufman’s film, Perron’s cyanotypes of Altaglass activate the associated objects themselves, inducing that electric excitement. While the film and cyanotypes are important aspects of Prairie glass history, they do not replace the objects themselves. Instead, these associated glass-related activities activate and resonantly relate to early examples of studio glass, which can be easily dismissed and deemed too amateur, and to Altaglass which more often than not has been relegated to the realms of the unfashionable and kitsch.

### **Amongst Hundreds of Objects, Craft Loses It**

As already stated, this dissertation does not provide an exhaustive survey of fine craft production on the Canadian Prairies of the type seen in American projects such as Janet

Koplos and Bruce Metcalf's 2010 chronological survey textbook,<sup>21</sup> which contains over 400 illustrations, or the Museum of Arts and Design's (MAD) 2012 exhibition *Crafting Modernism: Midcentury American Art and Design*<sup>22</sup> with its more than 200 catalogue entries. Both of these projects richly illustrate the material culture of craft production in the United States while also contextualizing the makers and objects within the history of craft and art. However, at the same time, even with projects consisting of hundreds of objects, craft discourse has turned away from the enchanted looking at objects and the wondrous moments that follow in favour of discourses surrounding process, dematerialization, and expanding the field.

To date, Canadian post Second World War craft scholarship (which for the purposes of this dissertation encompasses projects examining pre-21<sup>st</sup> century makers and objects) includes national surveys such as Crawford's *Studio Ceramics in Canada 1920–2005*, Rosalyn J. Morrison's *Canadian Glassworks 1970–1990*, Sandra Alfoldy's *The Allied Arts: Architecture and Craft in Postwar Canada*, and Rachel Gotlieb and Michael Prokopow's *True Nordic: How Scandinavia Influenced Design in Canada*.<sup>23</sup> Like their American counterparts, these projects all contain hundreds of objects. Opening these books and catalogues in some ways is like opening your overfilled kitchen cabinets—there is a lot there but it can make you snow blind. In addition to these national views, provincial surveys which sometimes have a specific focus have also hit the shelves: Crawford's *A Fine Line: Studio Crafts in Ontario from 1930 to the Present* or the exhibition catalogue *Back to the Land: Ceramics from Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands 1970–1985* by Diane Carr and Nancy Janovicek.<sup>24</sup>

Canadian craft historian Sandra Alfoldy's (1969–2019) study *Crafting Identity: The Development of Professional Fine Craft in Canada*, exhaustively surveys not only the professionalization of fine crafts in Canada but also stresses the importance of both administrative organizations and specific women in supporting the crafts in Canada and on the Prairies.<sup>25</sup> However, unlike Canadian and American survey texts, *Crafting Identity* has a limited number of illustrations, and when it does reference specific objects, it does so in an illustrative way. Indeed, one of the driving forces behind this dissertation is the emphasis I place on the objects and what material culture studies can illuminate about those objects. As cultural historian Karen Harvey explains, “‘material culture’

encapsulates not just the physical attributes of an object, but the myriad and shifting contexts through which it acquires meaning.”<sup>26</sup> By its very nature, a survey precludes paying close attention to an object as it is about the bigger picture and narrative, and historical Canadian craft discourse is sorely lacking more focused, theoretical studies such as Elaine Cheasley Paterson and Susan Surette’s book *Sloppy Craft: Postdisciplinarity and the Crafts*, which focuses on 21<sup>st</sup> century aesthetic developments within craft.<sup>27</sup> In terms of historical Canadian craft discourse, the survey continues to dominate. In short, this dissertation extends the work of Koplos, Metcalf, Crawford, and Alfoldy by examining individual objects in order to understand how specific materials and techniques function as expressions of the culture or zeitgeist of a particular time and/or place.

The second American craft survey I mentioned above, *Crafting Modernism*, can also be compared to a Canadian exhibition. In 2011, craft and design historian Allan Collier curated the exhibition *The Modern Eye: Craft and Design in Canada 1940–1980*, which, like its American counterpart, included just over 200 objects and was accompanied by a lavishly illustrated catalogue.<sup>28</sup> Although both projects include a significant number of works, once again the objects serve mainly as illustrations of broader stylistic trends of the period and the examples tend to be typical of modernist craft and design. Harvey explains there are two ways to approach the study of objects: an object-driven approach and an object-centred approach.<sup>29</sup> An object-driven approach is one where objects are understood, through thick description, to be evidence of complex social relationships. The emphasis in this approach is more on people and their lives. While *Crafting Modernism* and *The Modern Eye: Craft and Design in Canada 1940–1980* fall a bit short of a true thick description, the accompanying essays do situate specific objects in relation to some of the complex social issues of the time. An object-centered approach tends to examine “technological development, typologies, and the aesthetic qualities of taste and fashion.”<sup>30</sup> Although these survey exhibitions use both approaches, they fail to pay enough attention to the objects themselves, which become mere illustrations of craft. I raise this issue as each of the following chapters is driven by the objects themselves. By taking hold of my resonant inclinations, in an object-driven manner, each chapter peels back the biographical layers of the objects and also makes use

of my own empathetic reactions to the objects. An “object-inspired approach” combines both approaches along with an empathetic, wonderous, and resonant focus because it is the objects themselves that drive and center the entire project.<sup>31</sup>

To accomplish this, all of my chapters use Prown’s methodology to avoid treating the objects as illustrations by constantly returning to them in order to not only examine technological developments but to also think about the way the objects function as evidence of complex social relations which actively shape a wide range of social experiences, identities, and relationships. Prown considers objects to be more than passive illustrations. He believes human-made objects—both consciously and unconsciously—embody the beliefs of individuals and the larger society connected to those very objects.<sup>32</sup> Prown further suggests we need to conceive of an “intellectual borderland” where the interests of a broad range of social sciences and humanities can work together, and I am very much attracted to this notion of a wonderous and enchanted borderland for craft which brings the object back into play. However, before this mingling can happen, the basic descriptive techniques applied in archeology and art history must be used in order to extract as much objective evidence as possible.<sup>33</sup> Although this essential first step is barely perceptible in the subsequent chapters, whenever possible I have seen the objects in person. I often start vault and archival visits off with an exercise where I carefully examine and record as much descriptive evidence as possible. This first step can reveal surprising things such as the fact that the rocks included in a number of Cicansky’s sculptures were not actual rocks but *trompe l’oeil* ceramic rocks.

The deduction or second phase of Prown’s approach allows for the senses of the researcher to be involved, and I begin chapter two with this exact step.<sup>34</sup> I should immediately point out I am not seeking a truly objective study of the material, which I believe is impossible. Instead, as a person who grew up on the Canadian Prairies, I draw from my experience by exploring my own biases and reactions to the case studies. All of the objects discussed are pieces I continually revisit. I even dream about the works, and some, like Cicansky’s absent fragments of domestic architecture discussed in chapter two haunt me. Rather than turning away from these affective hauntings, I have embraced them, treating them as borders to be frayed, broken, and re-solidified during my

investigation in order to understand how these case studies fit into my own experience and understanding of this particular time and place in relation to other forms of craft and object making. Prown acknowledges this relationship between researcher and object when he states: “Just as the object is only what it is at the moment of investigation, and as such may be more or less different than what it was when it was made, so too the analyst is what he is at the moment of investigation.... The particular encounter between an object with its history and an individual with his history shapes the deductions.”<sup>35</sup> According to Prown, by using such an affective approach, a different relationship is developed with the past.<sup>36</sup> It is a relationship that moves beyond the written words recording the past, something akin to my experience of first encountering *Pickled Eggs* and then stumbling upon it again in a museum vault.

Last in Prown’s approach is the *speculation phase*, which involves formulating theories and hypotheses generated from the material gathered during the *descriptive* and *deductive phases*.<sup>37</sup> Keeping the information already gathered and the subsequent ideas generated firmly in mind, Prown suggests shifting from a focus on the internal evidence of the object to investigate its external evidence. This phase makes even more space for resonance. However, keep in mind that throughout the process, Prown insists we continually revisit the object’s material specificity.<sup>38</sup>

One of the points of Prown’s three phased approach is to, among other things, isolate stylistic conventions in order to understand what they can tell us about a culture’s particular systems of belief. Prown defines “style” as the way something is done, produced or expressed.<sup>39</sup> Particularly important in this context is the fact that when I first saw some of the “simple” even “banal” pieces of early studio glass and Altglass, I dismissed them (due to my own bias) as poorly fabricated and insignificant. I have subsequently realized the sloppy, blob-like execution of some early studio glass and the proto-blobject aesthetic of Altglass challenges me to think about how these objects are similar and different. Looking closely at early studio glass, which I have previously dismissed, has also made me realize I have been trained to fetishize technical virtuosity, and there might actually be other just as interesting “poorly crafted” objects out there. As Prown observes looking closely can yield surprising insights:

When style is shared by clusters of objects in a time and place, it is akin to a cultural daydream expressing unspoken beliefs. Human minds are inhabited by a matrix of feelings, sensations, intuitions, and understandings that are nonverbal or preverbal, and in any given culture many of these are shared, held in common. Perhaps if we had access to a culture's dream world, we could discover and analyze some of these hidden beliefs. In the absence of that, I suggest that some of these beliefs are encapsulated in the form of things, and there they can be discerned and analyzed.<sup>40</sup>

Such ideas have already found favour in the craft community with critics like American craft and design theorist Glenn Adamson claiming Prown's argument persuasively mines the less self-conscious areas that culture "will not allow itself to speak aloud."<sup>41</sup> Could Cicansky's absent piece of ceramic wall discussed in chapter two relate to a cultural daydream that cannot be spoken out loud? In this respect, by enchantedly looking at and examining works such as Cicansky's wall or a kitschy glass rabbit by Altglass that have both had little to no exposure, I have made visible, objects and subjects that define the limits of craft and its specific disciplines.

The catalogues for the exhibitions *Crafting Modernism* and *The Modern Eye* organize their respective 200 plus objects around the disciplines stereotypically associated with craft including ceramics, enamelling, textiles, woodworking, jewellery, and glass, and both also include essays on design, modernism, and craft. It is the generic notion of craft in these latter essays that concerns me. To demonstrate what I mean, we can turn to the work of Canadian potter and writer Paula Gustafson (1941–2006). Between 2002 and 2007, Gustafson compiled and edited a three volume series of books examining contemporary craft practice and criticism.<sup>42</sup> This Canadian collection exemplifies a trend in craft scholarship that eschews organizing the material according to the traditional disciplines of craft, a move that Gustafson acknowledges as potentially dangerous.<sup>43</sup> Gustafson's assertion that certain types of knowledge act as the glue that holds the various disciplines together under the term "craft" is a position I find myself increasingly uncomfortable with not only because it allows words to surpass objects, in the sense that a number of the current books on craft do not carefully examine objects, but also because it can lead to sweeping generalizations.<sup>44</sup> For example, according to Gustafson, both "tapestry artists" and ceramists use their minds and hands, which connects them under the term "craft." While, on one level, I would of course agree with



her assertion, I am worried such a general definition of craft does not address the more precise ways tapestry artists and ceramists also think and approach making differently.

Defining craft as knowledge is not new. In fact, the notion of “craft” as a way of making and knowing first emerged during the latter half of the nineteenth century, as Koplos and Metcalf have observed, to “put pleasure back into work and to wrest making from the grip of the machine and reinvest it with humanity.”<sup>45</sup> Two influential writers, whose principles remain part of the definition of craft today, are the Englishmen John Ruskin (1819–1900) and William Morris (1834–1896). Responding to the rapid industrialization of society and the systematic deskilling of labour, Ruskin and Morris advocated for what philosophy professor Larry Shiner describes as, “a return to something like the medieval guild system in which (they) falsely imagined each worker was both designer and maker and found fulfillment in their work.”<sup>46</sup> Art history professor Maria Elena Buszek astutely points out for Ruskin and Morris it was “the particularities of craft knowledge” that could serve to redress the wrongs of the Industrial Revolution, and this association between craft and anti-industrialization has had a lasting impact.<sup>47</sup> An anti-industrial, slow, thoughtful approach to labour through a specific craft knowledge continued to characterize the Arts and Crafts movement. Curator and scholar M. Anna Fariello explains that Morris, a leader within the movement, “began in earnest to experiment with the goal of producing beautiful objects to transform society into a socialist utopia.”<sup>48</sup> And indeed, the work of Victor Cicansky and his politics—discussed in chapters one and two—continue this engagement with social reform and utopia. Shiner explains after the First World War, the Arts and Crafts movement was essentially over, but from it emerged two vital tendencies: “one was the studio craft movement, with its individual ateliers and small workshops; the other was the idea of total design, closely linking the decorative arts to architecture and industry.”<sup>49</sup> This meant studio crafts were designed by the same people who made them, and the designs were based on “traditional forms.”<sup>50</sup> In both cases, craft was once again about a particular type of knowledge, but studio craft differentiated a certain type of knowledge within the broader field. Shiner points out the 1940 publication of *A Potter’s Book* by Bernard Leach (1887–1979) and his subsequent tours of North America with Sōetsu Yanagi (1889–1961) in the 1950s also had a lasting impact on the definition of studio craft in terms of valuing irregularity,

humility, natural materials, folk art, and the unknown craftsman whose knowledge came from “tradition.”<sup>51</sup>

Craft as making and knowledge continued to be important to the definition of Canadian craft, but as Alfoldy discusses in her book, the 1950s also marked a period of increased professionalization in the craft sector. In 1957, while working for the National Gallery of Canada, Donald Buchanan (1908–1966) curated the *First National Fine Crafts Exhibition* where he defined the term fine crafts in relation to skill and the pleasure such finely crafted objects evoked in both the hand and eye.<sup>52</sup> Alfoldy points out for the Alberta-born Buchanan, the word “fine” was used in order to distinguish professionally made objects from those that were not made by professionals. In addition, Buchanan believed “craft had a responsibility to work with industry, both to overcome the division between the two and to aid postwar Canada in creating a supply of well-designed, mass-produced objects to replace wartime shortages.”<sup>53</sup> For Alfoldy, “professional craft,” and by extension fine craft, does not necessarily have to do with the level of education of a craftsperson. Instead, a professional fine craftsperson is someone who works within a sophisticated conceptual framework: “it is expected that professionals will possess advanced technical skills, whether they are acquired through formal or self-education; however, technical skills do not translate into erudite conceptual abilities.”<sup>54</sup> In the exhibition catalogues from the period, the word “crafts” is used rather than “craft” which currently dominates the discourse. To me, this choice of words indicates Buchanan and other contemporaries of the time still acknowledged the various disciplines within the field of craft. As Alfoldy rightly points out, “modern craft” during this time period was not a unified field but was instead divided by hierarchical distinctions imposed upon different types of materials, patrons, locations, and levels of governmental support.<sup>55</sup> Today, craft has turned away from the object and is understood as a much more unified field as seen with Gustafson’s discussion on craft knowledge.

American jeweller and craft historian Bruce Metcalf writes in “Contemporary Craft: A Brief Overview,” that a significant reinvention of craft occurred in the United States after the Second World War.<sup>56</sup> With the creation of the “GI Bill,” returning servicemen and women were able to access a free college education. This led to an

exponential growth in craft education at the college level in the U.S. Many of these ex-soldiers were deeply suspicious of the regimented life in the armed services and were looking for an honourable vocation in which they could remain relatively independent and be their own boss... This was the era of 'free art' and 'free jazz,' when the European avant-garde met the native culture of be-bop."<sup>57</sup>

Consequently, as more and more art departments opened craft programs, the evaluation of craft and the makers who taught within the programs were increasingly assessed on the same measures as other academic disciplines: graduate degrees were required and proof of scholarly engagement—which often took the form of art gallery type exhibitions—was a must.<sup>58</sup> However, Koplos and Metcalf explain those tenured craft professors had salaries which insulated them from market demands, enabling them to create fewer, larger objects which were more complex and experimental. In turn, the academy increasingly favoured craft that resembled fine art, and “a collective amnesia regarding the history of decorative arts” developed.<sup>59</sup> It is also important to note a number of tenured professors served as jurors for important craft exhibitions, which in turn privileged a certain type of craft over other forms and hastened the division between academics and “traditional” craftspeople.<sup>60</sup>

As Alföldy also notes, the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by increasing professionalization and a proliferation of organizations with different agendas:

The decade of the 1960s encouraged a new approach to the crafts that emphasized innovation, interdisciplinarity, and saw the materialization of a new organization, the Canadian Craftsmen's Association... Significantly, it was a US craft initiative, The First World Congress of Craftsmen, that galvanized Canadians into action. In direct opposition to the mandate of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, the Congress echoed the US embrace of modernism, encouraging crafts people to look forward, not backward for inspiration.<sup>61</sup>

This increased academicization, professionalization, and urge to look forward meant craft was not only about knowledge but also about specific media and its relationship to the broader art world. The American Craft Council was formed in the early 1940s, and according to Fariello, the council defined craft in America almost exclusively around the media of clay, wood, fiber, metal, and glass.<sup>62</sup> Shiner explains “communities of practice” developed around material-based crafts which led to separate academic departments, professional organizations, exhibitions, and journals, and by the 1960s, due to the large influx of university students studying craft alongside fine art, the larger craft community

divided once again into the “craft-as-art” movement (where the objects essentially borrow from the contemporary art movements of the time) and the more traditional studio crafts people.<sup>63</sup> According to Alföldy, the developments in Canada were much the same: “These professional standards mirrored the modern art community, placing equal emphasis on the technical and the conceptual. It was no longer enough to simply be a proficient craftsman. One had to be able to contextualize wool, clay, metal, and wood as well as manipulate them.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore, when I use the term craftsman, I am referring to a maker who can work with industry (whether it is large or small scale) and/or is comfortable contextualizing his or her work within or outside the fine art world. For example, the university and industry played an important role within the development of early studio glass in Canada. I discuss these contexts and glass’ relationship to the academy and industry in chapter three where I argue blowing glass on film, or in a ceramics studio, or in a converted chicken coop, or in a factory in Medicine Hat are all important parts of early Canadian studio glass history and all are undertaken by craftspeople.

The connection of craft to the art world in the 1960s has had the lasting ramification of positioning craft within an art-craft dialectic that continues today in Maria Elena Buszek’s anthology *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* and Glenn Adamson’s *Thinking Through Craft*.<sup>65</sup> In *Thinking Through Craft*, Adamson describes craft not as a set of things but rather in terms of relational knowledge, as an amalgamation of a set of core principles: supplemental, material, skill, pastoral, and amateur. These core craft principles are not about things but represent a specific approach, attitude, or habit of action.<sup>66</sup> Craft, in this binary art-craft way of thinking, is marginalized yet indispensable to the modern project: “My central argument, when all is said and done, is that craft’s inferiority might be the most productive thing about it.”<sup>67</sup> Adamson argues craft is antithetical to modern art because a modern art object must be autonomous whereas a craft object is supplemental. Because of art’s autonomy, it, and by extension the artist, is free of art’s history and is in a position to critique other institutions (political, commercial, social, economic, or religious).<sup>68</sup> In contrast, Adamson describes the supplemental nature of craft:

To say that craft is supplemental, then, is to say that it is always essential to the end in view, but in the process of achieving that end, it disappears. And indeed this accords well with standard notions of craft. Whether it functions in relation to a modern artwork, or some other everyday need, proper craftsmanship draws no attention to itself; it lies beneath notice, allowing other qualities to assert themselves in their fullness.<sup>69</sup>

While I agree with Adamson's assertion that the supplemental is an important aspect to craft, and a well-made pot, for example, can disappear leaving room for other qualities to assert themselves, this is only in the eyes or hands of the beholder. Craft isn't one thing. It shifts and morphs depending on its use, and in the case of the objects discussed in this dissertation and the practices of their makers, craft can be political even as it draws attention to the processes of its making or through expert skill hides those very processes. To me, craft is neither autonomous nor is it supplemental, and that is what makes it so exciting.

In addition to modern art's autonomy, Adamson argues modern art also aims to create a purely visual effect unlike craft, which "always entails an encounter with the properties of a specific medium."<sup>70</sup> This is Adamson's core craft principle of material, and I take this notion up in detail in chapter one where I examine Cicansky's encounters with clay, fibre, wood, and glass. Adamson admits more often than not, when craft has been compared to modern art, it is seen as a failure because it is not autonomous and not visual—it is supplemental and material. However, Adamson suggests craft might also be understood as a way to think beyond the limited parameters of the modernist ideal of an autonomous visual artwork.<sup>71</sup> Although I utilize his classifications of craft in some form or another in each chapter, I also take issue with Adamson's narrow definition of modern art as autonomous as this notion has been increasingly challenged within the art world itself as scholars have brought to light large bodies of work that were made outside of these narrow confines.<sup>72</sup> In this respect, it should be stressed Adamson's study is limited to examining the points of contact between rather narrowly defined notions of both Modern art and craft.

Perhaps most interesting from my point of view is Adamson's discussion of skill as it moves away from dialectical oppositions between Modern art and craft. For the core principle of skill, Adamson explores theories of the woodworker David Pye (1914–1993),

the educator John Dewey (1859–1952), and the architect Kenneth Frampton, in order to argue that skill is central to the politics of 20<sup>th</sup> century visual culture.<sup>73</sup> It is a very complicated principle because skill is taken for granted, and Adamson argues skill needs to be understood in much broader terms. Skill is not a discreet set of techniques, but rather is a way of being within society. For example, through skill, the craftsman not only engages with the material but also uses the constraints of the material to actually shape the object itself. This definition of skill is explored in depth in chapter one as I describe how Cicansky utilized and pushed against material constraints. In chapter three, the workmanship of risk and the workmanship of certainty—concepts articulated by Pye in relation to skill—are examined when discussing factory and studio glassblowing and the objects associated with each environment. Skill also relates to the material cultural work of sociologist Tim Dant who is interested in how objects, in an autonomous and active way, can shape relationships and culture. I rely on Dant extensively in chapter three when I discuss glassblowing.

Recent publications continue to expand the concept and understanding of craft and have complemented and complicated Adamson's notion of craft as an action rather than a specific set of objects. But, in a way, craft has "lost it" as objects do not drive and inspire craft today. Assistant professor in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture at the University of California, Jenni Sorkin, argues in her book *Live Form: Women, Ceramics, and Community* that ceramics are central to feminist history, and to a larger extent the art history of the 1950s and 1960s, and have played an important role in the development of non-hierarchical and participatory art-related experiences.<sup>74</sup> Adeptly expanding the field, Sorkin contends during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ceramics developed alongside crucial therapeutic activities that were pioneered by women potters, which in turn uniquely positioned ceramics as a socially-engaged art form.<sup>75</sup> Rather than focus on specific objects, Sorkin presents her thesis through biographical case studies including those of Marguerite Wildenhain (1896–1985), associated with the North Carolina institution Black Mountain College, American public television personality Susan Peterson (1925–2009), and potter and poet M. C. Richards (1916–1999).<sup>76</sup> Sorkin builds upon a reciprocal state of making that Wildenhain describes in her 1957 book *Pottery: Form and Expression* as "live" where through sensitive manipulation of the clay in

relation to a potter's body, a form takes shape. Wildenhein states, "A spout of a pitcher had that specific form, that unabstract, live form because it was actually discovered through fingers, and not abstractly, as a theoretical concept in the brain, but through contact of a finger with its material."<sup>77</sup> For Sorkin, Wildenhein's concept of potting, or "live form," encompasses not only the use of the artist's body to create a live, immediate form but is also a process of learning that is integral to ceramics as a whole, a "performative gesture of collective skill building through the pottery demonstration."<sup>78</sup> As Sorkin puts it, throwing "is less a singular act than an integrated system of transference, a reciprocity between teaching/learning and social/affective imperatives,"<sup>79</sup> and this is what makes it so important to the rise of participatory art practices in the 1960s and 1970s. Although *Live Form* contains a number of illustrations, it is not so much the objects that drive or inspire Sorkin but the actions and processes of the potters, curators, and other community members.

By contrast, design and craft history professor Ezra Shales' book, *The Shape of Craft*, focuses on labour—including industrial labour—which is especially useful for my third and fourth chapters on glass. His points regarding material have served as inspiration throughout the dissertation and resonate in particular with chapter one:

Craft demands that humans meet material at some middle ground that is not entirely anthropocentric. "Empathy for material" is a much better rule than "truth to material"...Craft has too long been hung up on the principle of "truth to materials," which sounds wonderfully ethical but has mostly been an excuse to condemn plastic, machine-made goods or ornament as well as people, on aesthetic grounds via moral pretexts.<sup>80</sup>

Shales' broad approach to craft and his ability to connect broader contemporary issues to both historical examples of labour, material, and some objects is inspirational, but his focus remains more on action than objects, reflecting the current loss of the object in craft.

Craft has lost it, and by "it" I mean the object. Losing "it" is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, the field, since the turn of the century, has shifted focus from the "crafts" as unique modes of investigation and discreet sets of objects to something much more unified and dematerialized. I do not wish to subvert or change this trend, but as someone

who loves objects and finds wonder within them, I wish to complicate the current state of affairs.

### **To be Indisciplined, to find the object**

The work of Adamson and Sorkin, to cite two examples, has contributed and defined craft today, but in the process of doing so, “craft” has started to suffer from generalizations. In part, this is because craft has moved away from the object. Strangely enough, Buszek includes an essay in her anthology on contemporary craft by Fariello that calls for specific language: “To be talked about, understood, appreciated, and valued, craft must have a language of its own.”<sup>81</sup> I would add to this assertion by saying each craft discipline (ceramics and glass are of particular importance to this project), needs a language of its own.

Thus I am, for lack of a better word, a “disciplinariophile.” Although authors such as Adamson, reject limiting craft discourse to specific disciplines in favour of more fluid and relative terms which ultimately expand the field, I do not wish to escape the boundaries inherent in craft disciplines because the knowledge and thinking required to weave a textile and throw a pot, while similar in some respects, are dramatically different in others.<sup>82</sup> I wish to explore these similarities and differences in order to develop discipline-specific languages and methods for understanding glass and ceramics. I do this in the hope of enabling people to better appreciate objects such as Altaglass’ glass animals which have not received adequate attention in part because the kitschy glass bunnies have fallen by the wayside amongst the generalizations associated with craft and the focus on objects that are closer to fine art. By introducing a personally resonant material cultural approach to crafted objects, I hope to have created both a space and a language for those objects that have been relegated to the margins.

In order to do this, I have adopted an “indisciplined” approach. Art historian W.J.T. Mitchell introduced the term in 1995 when discussing the problems with interdisciplinarity and his increasing feeling of incompetence:

My real interest, in other words has not been in interdisciplinarity so much as in forms of ‘indiscipline,’ of turbulence or incoherence at the inner and outer boundaries of disciplines. If a discipline is a way of insuring the continuity of a set of collective practices (technical, social, professional, etc.), ‘indiscipline’ is a



moment of breakage or rupture, when the continuity is broken and the practice comes into question.<sup>83</sup>

As a disciplinariophile, my indisciplined approach focuses on specific materials and the limits imposed by those materials both physically and in the context of the rich history of each craft discipline. Discipline-specific writing as a whole is mainly made up of biographical surveys, how-to manuals or picture books such as the much loved/hated 500 series by Lark Publishers. There are, however, a few exceptions. For example, the Canadian ceramist and theorist Paul Mathieu has written extensively on “ceramics” as a distinct and autonomous art form. In a recent publication, he explains that in order for something to be considered ceramics it must be a hollow volumetric object with a distinct surface.<sup>84</sup> A sculpture can be made of clay, but if the approach and specific knowledge used to make the piece does not relate to Mathieu’s definition of ceramics, then it is a sculpture made of clay. This is not to say that the sculpture is worthless; it is just different than a ceramic piece where the maker has adopted a ceramics frame of mind. Whenever I discuss ceramics, I rely heavily on the discipline-specific work of Mathieu because he extends the definition of ceramics beyond the stereotypical limitations associated with clay while also addressing the specifics of the discipline and its history. For glass, Koen Vanderstukken—a Canadian glass artist himself—has clearly articulated what makes studio glass a unique and autonomous art form, and his discussions on glass’ ability to change and distort reality and the concept of virtuality have served as inspiration for my discussions in chapter four on the work of craft theorist Mireille Perron and Altaglass.<sup>85</sup> For me, and as demonstrated in the following chapters, the objects themselves are of utmost importance, and, even when they are absent, they will not be treated as mere illustrations of an approach or theory. That is why I have elected to ground my object analysis deep within the foundations of material culture.

### **Between the Covers**

As outlined above, this dissertation is informed by art history, material culture, and craft theory and is divided into two parts, with two chapters in each part. Part I is focused on the work of Victor Cicansky, and Part II focuses on glass. Although the chapters within each part relate to one another, they can also stand alone as integrated articles. The first

chapter in each part is longer and more involved, designed to lay a foundation for future resonant study and discourse. The second chapter in each part is shorter and takes up the invitation to continue the discourse by paralleling, responding to, and/or filling in certain gaps. A resonant relationship, like the one I have with this subject matter, is a process that is never complete, and the structure of this dissertation with a foundational chapter followed by a resonant response is meant to demonstrate the importance of continued study, pointing to where further study can lead.

### **PART I: Victor Cicansky**

Cicansky is hardly an unknown figure within the history of Saskatchewan art and/or craft and has been included in numerous exhibitions and publications since the late 1960s.<sup>86</sup> Donald Kerr's 2004 biography *The Garden of Art: Vic Cicansky Sculptor* paired with Cicansky's recent 2019 autobiography *Up From Garlic Flats*, provide ample biographical information on Cicansky.<sup>87</sup> In 1980, Cicansky was included in the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery's group exhibition *The Continental Clay Connection*.<sup>88</sup> The exhibition explored and made visible the direct links between developments in ceramic sculpture in both Saskatchewan and California. This connection is also explored in the later *Regina Clay: Worlds in the Making* exhibition and briefly in "Prairie Pots and Beyond," and therefore, I do not explore it in much detail here. In *The Continental Clay Connection* catalogue, curator Maija Bismanis traces the historical precedents of Regina's figurative funky aesthetic to California practitioners such as Peter Voulkos (1924–2002) and Robert Arneson (1930–1992), and then relates their work to Abstract Expressionism and other art world "isms."<sup>89</sup> Unlike Saskatchewan ceramists Marilyn Levine (1935–2005) and Joe Fafard (1942–2019), Cicansky is not singled out in Bismanis' catalogue essays, but his biographical writeup discusses his sculptural work in relation to humour and Rococo excess.<sup>90</sup>

Shortly after the *Continental Clay Connection* group exhibition, Cicansky's 1983 retrospective *Victor Cicansky: Clay Sculpture* toured across the country. It was accompanied by an illustrated exhibition catalogue written by the co-curators Bruce W. Ferguson and Carol Phillips and published by the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery. In the catalogue essay "Victor Cicansky: The Garden as Vessel," Ferguson discusses

Cicansky's sculptural works in relation to regionalism which he considers to be closely associated with notions of the rural or agricultural.<sup>91</sup> Phillips unpacks Cicansky's murals in the essay "Cicansky's Imagery: A Personal Note," through biography—both her's and Cicansky's—and to growing up in the east end of Regina.<sup>92</sup> In 2005, the MacKenzie Art Gallery presented *Regina Clay: Worlds in the Making*, which grouped together the works of a number of ceramists who were working at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus.<sup>93</sup> The sculptural works included in the exhibition curated by Timothy Long were replete with humour, California influence, a celebration of the local, colour, and a postmodern affinity for narrative and historic sampling. Cicansky figured prominently in the *Regina Clay: Worlds in the Making* exhibition with 18 sculptures, and Long relates his work in the catalogue essay to nostalgia, identity, labour, and Pop Art.<sup>94</sup> Long also quotes from Ferguson's earlier essay in relation to Cicansky and notions of the rural and regionalism.<sup>95</sup> These projects have all, in some form or another, framed Cicansky relative to regional identity, rural and agrarian culture, California, humour, and various art world "isms." With a few craft-related exceptions which focus on particular aspects of Cicansky's practice such as ceramic and craft theorist Susan Surette's PhD dissertation "Canadian Ceramic Relief Murals: Studio Craft and Architecture – A Case Study of the Sturdy-Stone Centre Murals, 1975–1983,"<sup>96</sup> Cicansky's career, spanning over seven decades, has not been thought through in regards to craft, and especially in terms of the changing understandings of and definitions for craft.

Chapter one, "Of Thread and Branches: Victor Cicansky's Crafted Path," is a material- and object-inspired retrospective re-examination of Cicansky's oeuvre and is an extended version of the essay "Victor Cicansky's Crafted Path," published in the 2019 exhibition catalogue *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener's Universe*.<sup>97</sup> The exhibition, co-curated by myself and the MacKenzie Art Gallery's head curator, Timothy Long, set out (among other things) to reframe Cicansky's work in relation to craft, postcolonialism, the environment, pedagogical theory, prairie literature, and a broader historical understanding of the relationship between Saskatchewan and California.<sup>98</sup>

"Of Thread and Branches: Victor Cicansky's Crafted Path," opens by recounting an incident that took place in 1997 between Cicansky and the curators at the National Gallery who dismissed his work as rural, agrarian, bucolic, occasionally humorous, and

ultimately on a different “path” than work that was currently of interest to the Gallery.<sup>99</sup> I argue Cicansky’s “path” was and continues to be defined by a sustained engagement with material on a physical and metaphorical level and the constraints associated with ceramics. The chapter builds upon Adamson’s assertion that craft “always entails an encounter with the properties of a specific medium,”<sup>100</sup> by adopting the definition that craft is a sustained engagement on a physical and metaphorical level with materials and the subsequent discipline-related constraints associated with those materials. As a whole, the chapter is organized chronologically and is divided into four metaphor- and object-inspired sections which each relate back to material and specific craft-related writing such as textiles and concepts of the fold as articulated by Pennina Barnett, wood in relation to George Nakashima’s writings on the soul of a tree, and virtuality with its relationship to glass and the viewer/user as reasoned by Koen Vanderstukken.<sup>101</sup>

While this study is object-inspired, chapter two, “Potted Plants and Wallpaper: Victor Cicansky’s Turn to the Domestic,” complicates this approach by examining one of Cicansky’s absent objects: a ceramic trompe l’oeil chunk of a domestic wallpapered wall, planted in a terracotta pot titled *Wallpaper Flowers*, 1974. Although I desperately wanted to include this object in Cicansky’s retrospective, Long and I were unable to locate any examples from the entire *Wallpaper Flowers* series though I did find numerous photographic examples in Cicansky’s archive, indicating they did exist at one point and were significant enough to be photographed. This missing state reminded me of Glenn Adamson’s essay “The Case of the Missing Footstool: Reading the Absent Object.”<sup>102</sup> Adamson’s essay inspired me to reflect upon absence in relation to the curatorial decisions I made during the production phase of *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener’s Universe*, and I realized I had justified and accepted the absence of *Wallpaper Flowers*. Shortened versions of this chapter were presented at the 2019 Universities Art Association of Canada Conference in Quebec City and as part of the 2020 Nickle at Noon lecture series hosted by Nickle Galleries at the University of Calgary.

“Potted Plants and Wallpaper: Victor Cicansky’s Turn to the Domestic” is an experimental post-curatorial/post-exhibition exercise where I think through and hypothesize the contributing causes of the series’ absence and my role as a curator and researcher. The chapter opens with a list of words I recorded while incorporating Prown’s

deductive phase, which involved engaging on a sensory level with the object; in this case, it was with an absent object only available through photographs. I had to imagine what *Wallpaper Flowers* might feel like, smell like, and how it made me feel. After introducing Cicansky and describing the curatorial process undertaken by Long and myself, the chapter is divided into four case studies inspired by four of the words/emotive responses which opened the chapter: domestic, forgotten, layered eclecticism, and ruins and growth. Adopting a flight of fancy approach, each of these case studies explores a possible contributing factor to the *Wallpaper Flowers* series' absence. These flights, so to speak, illuminate Cicansky's "turn towards the domestic" and suggest that his activities as a "hippie modernist" are immensely important, yet often overlooked, when studying the political motivations behind his practice. These flights also bring to light aspects of his practice that are not as deeply explored in chapter one such as domesticity and gender.

## **PART II: Glass**

The story of the birth of studio glass in North America is dominated by a "founding father" and a "big bang" theory: Harvey Littleton (1922–2013), Dominick Labino (1910–1987) and the Toledo Workshop of March 23, 1962.<sup>103</sup> Time after time, historical accounts of both Canadian and American studio glass trace their way back to Littleton and this exact moment. Although this narrative has grown to mythic proportions, it says very little about why studio glass developed when it did in Canada.

Needless to say, there are a number of useful sources related to the history of glass and studio glass, even if they perpetuate the big bang moments. *Five Thousand Years of Glass*, edited by decorative arts curator Gerald Hugh Tait, serves as an informative global history of glass covering Egyptian, Roman, Islamic, Chinese, European, and American glass objects; processes such as core forming, blowing, cutting, and pressing glass are all covered.<sup>104</sup> However, the survey stops at 1940 and only briefly covers the development of studio glass in a two-page epilogue, highlighting the division between studio glass, factory glass, and decorative arts. Tait does complicate the big bang theory by pointing out that the Fauve painter Maurice Marinot (1882–1960) taught himself how to work with glass outside of a team long before the 1960s but is careful to conclude that Marinot

still needed a glassworks factory. The epilogue then goes on to relay the story of Littleton and Labino.

There are several survey-type publications devoted specifically to the history of the studio glass movement. *Artists in Glass: Late Twentieth Century Masters in Glass* by author, art dealer, and former director of 20th century decorative art for Christie's Auctions, Dan Klein and *Glass Art* by glass artist Peter Layton both take a global biographical approach with a short introductory-type essay on the history of studio glass followed by numerous profiles on specific people.<sup>105</sup> Layton's book also contains a section on materials and techniques where different techniques associated with studio glass are described in great detail, once again including "how-to" writing within a craft publication.<sup>106</sup> *Women Working in Glass* by glass artist Lucartha Kohler also opens with an essay on the history of glass, although this time it is a "herstory," and then proceeds with biographical profiles of women who work with glass.<sup>107</sup>

Criticality within the literature associated with the studio glass movement can be found, although it is not prevalent. The American periodicals *New Glass Review* and *Glass Quarterly* (originally *New Work in Glass*) were both founded in 1979 and continue to cover studio glass on a national and global scale and have provided some critical and historical information.<sup>108</sup> The book, *Contemporary Glass*, edited by Blanche Craig, divides the field into four themes—Vessel/Object, Sculpture, Surface/Light and Installation—and each section opens with a critical essay on the thematic subject followed by relevant biographical profiles of makers from around the world.<sup>109</sup> Writer and curator William Warmus' exhibition catalogue *Fire and Form* adeptly explores the unique properties and conceptual potentiality of the material as a form of artistic expression.<sup>110</sup> For me, any of Warmus' writing on glass is illuminating as it moves beyond a straight telling of who was where when and into synthesis. For example, he writes:

Glass is one of a small group of transparent and fluid media. The others include water and cyberspace. All three share a 'tele-vision' mode: objects embedded in these media can, under the right conditions of manipulation, remain visible at a distance; mistakes are difficult to conceal in such transparent realms. Spaces can be artificially compressed, as when a slab of glass is ground into a telescope lens that makes the far seem near, or a stream of energy is coded to transmit an image from one place to another. And a key to the aesthetic of such media is the

phenomenon of floatation, whereby objects embedded within these media defy gravity and appear to float in space, visible from all angles...Glass is an optimistic and buoyant art. It amplifies color and light. It occupies a space in between the two states of liquid and solid, like dolphins jumping between water and air.<sup>111</sup>

Like Warmus' writing, Associate Professor of English, John Garrison's book *Glass* from Bloomsbury's *Object Lessons* series, provocatively connects glass in the everyday contemporary world with historical depictions of glass in literature, bringing new resonant insight to the field itself.<sup>112</sup> Most recently, Koen Vanderstukken's book *Glass: Virtual, Real* combines this same level of criticality and conceptual study of the field of glass with chapters on the history of studio glass and its relationship to modernism and a chapter devoted to a scientific approach to glass.<sup>113</sup>

Connecting the development of American studio glass to art or factory-made glass is covered in the lavishly illustrated book *American Studio Glass 1960–1990* by Martha Drexler Lynn.<sup>114</sup> Drexler Lynn explores the impact of universities, conferences, markets, and exhibitions during the early days of studio glass but does not cover Canada in her study. Her introduction, "Common or Exalted?" does a thorough job of reviewing studio glass-related literature.<sup>115</sup> Throughout the book, she also explores the relationship between decorative art, craft, fine art, and studio glass but often uses the objects to illustrate her point—they do not drive or inspire her project. Interestingly, Drexler Lynn does devote a section to the difference between factory and studio glass as she rightly points out "when the word *studio* is combined with *glass*, it is generally understood that the antonym is *factory*."<sup>116</sup> She states, "the distinction [between factory and studio glass] rests on the number of identical items produced and the method of production, the key element being the reliance on the machine over the individual expression of the maker."<sup>117</sup> As I outline in chapter three, this distinction is not so clear-cut, should be questioned, and is irrelevant. While factory and studio glass are different, it is important to examine both approaches to glass.

The division between studio and factory-made glass is also prevalent in the Canadian discourse: it could be described as two separate histories. A significant amount of study on early glass in Canada was undertaken by the late Gerald Stevens with publications such as *Early Canadian Glass* and *Glass in Canada: The First One Hundred*

*Years*.<sup>118</sup> Stevens was an avid collector to the point of possibly overstating the types of glassblowing activities at some factories,<sup>119</sup> was self-directed in his studies as it appears as though he initiated his own “archeological” digs,<sup>120</sup> and was interested in locating and telling the story of Canadian glassworks and glass objects of the past and not what people were making at the time of his publications. Therefore, he did not cover the studio glass movement in Canada nor did he include the Medicine Hat, AB company Altaglass which was founded in 1950 by John Furch (1896–1976), Emily Furch (1897–1987), Margarete Stagg (1925–2000), and Les Stagg (1920–1985) and closed in 1988.<sup>121</sup> Like the history of early factory-made glass in Canada, the history of Altaglass has been mainly written by avid collectors. Derek and Ann McNaney’s self published *Swan Song: The Story of Altaglass* is the most comprehensive with a history of the company, followed by an illustrated price guide.<sup>122</sup> Mary Coward’s *Altaglass: Manufacturers of Hand Made Glass* is a close second.<sup>123</sup> Publications such as these provide next to no criticality, nor do they include discussions surrounding larger historical, social, and glass-related contexts. Glass historian and artist Bruno Andrus’ article “In the Spectacle: Canadian Artistic Glass at Expo 67,” critically examines the glass objects of two contemporaneous glass companies to Altaglass—Lorraine Glass Industries of Montreal, QC and Chalet Artistic Glass of Cornwall, ON (1962–1975)—but Altaglass has not received the same attention.<sup>124</sup>

In terms of the discourse surrounding Canadian studio glass specifically, for a number of years the Glass Art Association of Canada (GAAC) published the quarterly periodical *Contemporary Canadian Glass* which, like its American counterparts, featured exhibition reviews and articles of a historical and critical nature. In 1989, Dan Klein included an overview of Canadian studio glass-related activities in his book *Glass: A Contemporary Art*.<sup>125</sup> Although Klein asserts Canadian glass’ greatest inspiration comes from the landscape, he relates a number of his points either back to developments within American studio glass or to specific people south of the border, and the Canadian section reads more like a list of people and what they do rather than a close examination of Canadian studio glass production and the objects themselves.<sup>126</sup> Curator Rosalyn J. Morrison’s catalogue, *Canadian Glassworks 1970–1990*, provides an excellent historical essay on the development of studio glass in Canada which briefly mentions early glass factories, includes biographic profiles on 13 artists, and a timeline mapping out important



milestones in Canadian Studio Glass' history.<sup>127</sup> Morrison's work has proven to be invaluable in highlighting important individuals and the roles they played within the history of Canadian studio glass, but it does not carefully and critically examine specific glass objects. British Columbia scholar Catherine Siermacheski's PhD dissertation "Not So Fragile: An Ethnography of Women Glass Blowers in Western Canada" broadens the historical record of Canadian studio glass by bringing women's voices directly into the conversation through numerous interviews.<sup>128</sup> Siermacheski's dissertation is inspired and centered by narrative and ethnography. She discusses gender in relation to Canadian glass but does not discuss specific objects in detail. I would not consider her study to be object-inspired as it is centered on the women glass blowers themselves.

Chapter three, "Shattering the Cannon and Spinning a Discourse: Playing with Early Prairie Glass," proposes a new way to approach glass, one that is object-, process-, and material-inspired. A shorter version of this chapter was published in a 2013 special issue of *Cahiers métiers d'art :: Craft Journal* devoted to glass.<sup>129</sup> Like chapter two which opens with an absent object and not a physical one, this chapter opens with a Prownian description of a two-minute film of Marty Kaufman blowing glass in the Alberta College of Art's hot shop, Calgary, Alberta in 1979.<sup>130</sup> This film and Kaufman's actions serve as the starting point for this chapter because shortly after I saw the Kaufman film, I heard a lecture in 2011 by artist and theorist David Surman titled "Videogames and the Neo-Baroque" where he talked about the work of sociologist Roger Caillois.<sup>131</sup> Surman's lecture immediately inspired me to connect Caillois' game theory and especially his fourth rubric of play, *ilinx* (or vertiginous play), to glass because blowing glass or working with it in the hotshop requires a constant spinning motion. Traces of this spinning motion are also present in the glass objects themselves.<sup>132</sup> Because *ilinx* is so integral to the process of blowing glass and is physically present in blown glass objects, this approach is glass-inspired or glass-centric. Of particular note is the fact that *ilinx* is present in both studio and factory blown glass, making it an ideal avenue for studying Canadian glass as a whole, breaking down the division between factory and studio glass that is so prevalent in current glass discourse. In this chapter, *ilinx* and play unite both Altglass and the work of early studio glass blowers such as Kaufman, Ione Thorkelsson,

Robert Held, and Martha Henry, troubling a hierarchy that otherwise might perpetuate class and ethnic divisions.

The chapter approaches and studies early studio glass on the Prairies in broader terms, from craft- and glass-based perspectives, rather than through an art-based perspective rooted in canons, genealogy, and mythic tales which continue the false binary of studio versus factory-made glass—all amply covered in a number of the glass-related sources listed above. In turn, I argue in “Shattering the Cannon and Spinning a Discourse: Playing with Early Prairie Glass,” studio glass developed when it did in the Prairie provinces because its playful, ilinx-like nature complemented the culture of the time as it represented, during the 1960s and 1970s, a concerted shift in the approach to the material. This new approach was a reflection of the times in Canada and the United States which made the actions and subsequent objects appealing to a variety of people. Through vertiginous play during the making process and the development and celebration of an aesthetic which destroyed the stability of modernism’s dominant definition of glass as futuristic, transparent, and visually weightless, early studio glass blowers such as Kaufman and Thorkelsson embraced a “tune in” and “drop out” approach to glassblowing which mirrored Canadian counter cultural social experiments in individual liberation, improvisation, and collective passion. While play and ilinx unite Altaglass with the activities of the early studio glassblowers, when examining the motivations behind the play, the difference between the work of Thorkelsson and Altaglass, for example, is apparent. This difference, however, is not based on where the glass was blown—studio vs. factory—but on approaching the subject from a glass-centric perspective.

Throughout the chapter, I continue to play with instances of unity and disunity (peppered with genealogical forays which I critique at the same time) in order to shatter the canon and spin a new discourse. For example, I end the chapter by examining specific playful and chunky examples by Altaglass, Held, Henry, and Thorkelsson in relation to the *blobject* and its associated aesthetic as described by design curators Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov in their book *Blobjects & Beyond: The New Fluidity in Design*.<sup>133</sup> I close by suggesting that when an object-inspired approach to glass is adopted, these early forays into studio glass and their kitschy factory-made counterparts (which are so easily

dismissed), might in fact be some of the earliest examples of a design aesthetic that will dominate the 1990s and early 2000s.

Chapter four, “Narratives of a Reflective Virtuality: Re-activating Altaglass’ Menagerie,” is a resonant response to chapter three and was published in the exhibition catalogue *Mireille Perron – The Anatomy of a Glass Menagerie: Altaglass*.<sup>134</sup> The exhibition at Nickle Galleries in Calgary (January 31–April 13, 2019) consisted of a menagerie of 113 Altaglass animals arranged on a table lit from below. The table was in the center of the gallery space and surrounded by 72 cyanotypes by Mireille Perron of the Altaglass on display. Before Perron’s exhibition was to open, curator Christine Sowiak asked me if I would contribute an essay in response to Perron’s exhibition. Perron, who is a ceramist, craft theorist, founder of the Laboratory of Feminist Pataphysics, and former Alberta College of Art + Design colleague, had read “Shattering the Cannon and Spinning a Discourse” in *Cahiers métiers d'art :: Craft Journal*. We had discussed the notion ofilinx, play, and the bubble several times. I immediately said yes to Sowiak’s request as it was an opportunity to apply the object- and glass-inspired approach outlined in chapter three that was already familiar to the artist and to a specific project which troubles the boundaries between past and present and art and craft.

I accompanied Sowiak and curator Michele Hardy on a visit to Perron’s Calgary studio where I learned how influential the work of early photographer Anna Atkins (1799–1871) was to Perron’s cyanotype project. Like the Kaufman film, which I consider to be an important part of Canadian glass history and should be read through a glass-centric lens, Perron’s cyanotypes of Altaglass animals should also be read through a glass-centric lens—they are more than just scientific, documentary studies of objects. Consequently, Atkins becomes an interesting conceptual intersection point between glass and photography.

Chapter four examines how Perron successfully uses the conceptual potentiality of glass (virtuality as articulated by Vanderstukken being the main one) to reactivate and highlight the importance of Altaglass within the history of glass on the Canadian Prairies.<sup>135</sup> Narrative plays an important role in Perron’s work, and the chapter reflects this by being organized into three narrative explorations: virtual vertiginous play, virtual impressions, and virtual worlds. “Virtual Vertiginous” play applies in the most direct way

to the concepts and approach to glass outlined in chapter three, and I pay particular attention to the bubble patterns in the Altaglass animals on display and captured in Perron's cyanotypes. The "Virtual Impressions" section scrutinizes the intersections between glass and photography and highlights the work of Atkins. The final section, "Virtual Worlds and Histories," examines the relationship between craft and nostalgia through the work of ceramic theorist Garth Clark and media artist and professor Svetlana Boym.<sup>136</sup> Then, through Perron's cyanotypes of virtual glass-filled worlds, a connection is made between nostalgia and glass, demonstrating how nostalgia can be productive to craft and glass discourses.

As I undertook my PhD, I engaged in numerous opportunities to curate and publish writing, including projects (in addition to those directly related to this dissertation and outlined above) associated with the Regina potter Jack Sures (1934–2018), Hansen-Ross Pottery of Fort Qu'Appelle, SK and trench art. Writing and curating for the public is an integral part of my practice as it enables me to reach various audiences, and I am a researcher, curator, and writer who intends to continue to write and curate for a broad public. Depending on the audience, at times I must distill complex ideas down into meaningful and digestible (specific to my audience) content, and this in turn helps me to solidify my ideas for the dissertation. Writing for catalogues, magazines, and journals has a different set of parameters—themes, timelines, length, and language—and the exercise of thinking through how my larger ideas can fit within those parameters has the effect of tightening up sections of the dissertation where I might have been verging too much towards the tangential. Presenting my ideas—whether it be in printed form or through live presentations—adds a level of drive and excitement to my practice. I find engaging with the audience before and after a presentation has led to additional points and questions that would otherwise not come up. For example, Calgary artist Ron Moppett had an extended discussion with me after my Nickle at Noon talk on Cicansky's absent object where we discussed appropriate markets for selling an object and how some series of works might be made specifically for family members and not the general public—therefore purposeful absence in a way I had not considered up until that point. I am grateful for his feedback, and it would not have occurred had I not presented at the University of Calgary.

Putting together and significantly expanding these articles for the dissertation is like an autopsy where the medical examiner carefully dissects an organ in order to ascertain a root cause, and I thrive on hunting for root causes. “Dissecting” has allowed me to dive deeper into certain aspects of my research with a specific academic audience in mind, and this dive is not limited by presentation time as it is at a conference nor word count as it is with most publications. With the dissertation writing, there is a level of creativity I do not entertain with the other forms of communication. For example, the list of words which opens chapter two ended up structuring the entire chapter and served as guideposts for my research. This approach to research and writing would not have happened had I been working under the confines of publication deadlines and conference parameters. In addition, chapter two has served as an exercise in critical self-reflection for both chapter one and the larger curatorial project *Victor Cicansky: The Gardner’s Universe*. There often isn’t time allotted for creative critical self-reflection in the publishing and gallery worlds that can be part of the research record and this dissertation afforded me the opportunity to do so. Chapter four, while it originated as a commissioned essay for Perron’s exhibition, also served as a form of critical self-reflection of my thinking as I was able to apply the concepts outlined in chapter three to a current body of work. What worked? What didn’t? What do I need to reconsider in chapter three? These were all questions that came about after writing chapter four. Most importantly, having the ability to work back and forth between dissertation work and other forms of communication enables my research to become part of the contemporary discourse surrounding craft: people know what I am researching and writing about, and it is current as it relates to other recent projects and is found in present-day publications. This approach to PhD research blurs the stereotype of the isolated academic in the ivory tower, engaged in research that no one knows about, and enables me to be engaged on multiple levels with the subject of craft and its community.

In sum, “Indisciplined Ceramic Outhouses and Blob-like Glass Bunnies: Four Case Studies on Canadian Prairie Ceramics and Glass” presents new indisciplined, object-inspired approaches to study craft of the Canadian Prairies. In general, there is a particular focus on objects made in the 1970s, but the study is not limited to this particular decade as it also looks back and forward in time. Throughout the dissertation, I

combine material culture-based methodology with craft history and theory, while always grounding and being inspired by the objects themselves. The work of Victor Cicansky is the focus of part one where I examine his decades-long practice and entire oeuvre in relation to craft, something which has yet to be done. With craft and Prownian material culture methodologies in mind, chapter two examines absence in relation to Cicansky's domestically themed work of the 1970s. Part two pushes the boundaries associated with studio glass by questioning the exclusion or limited inclusion of Altglass within the history of glass on the Canadian Prairies. In chapter three, I propose and test a glass-centric approach to the subject of glass which is then applied in chapter four to a contemporary Altglass-related project by Mireille Perron. Contrary to current trends in craft discourse where objects are used as illustration or are not included at all, in this study, objects are brought back into the discourse and histories associated with Canadian Prairie craft through an object-inspired approach which focuses on specific objects, materials, processes and their imposed limits in the context of the rich history of craft, ceramics, and glass. "Indisciplined Ceramic Outhouses and Blob-like Glass Bunnies" provides a framework for examining Prairie craft that moves beyond biography, genealogy, art history, and how-to descriptions as it is discipline specific and object-inspired.

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<sup>1</sup> Qtd. in Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 43, no. 4 (January 1990), 34.

<sup>2</sup> Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," 19–20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>4</sup> A "crazed" surface in ceramics refers to the crackling of the glaze. This can be the result of a glaze flaw where the expansion coefficients of the clay body and glaze are not well matched or it can be purposeful. Southern Song Guan Ware is characterized by its crackled or crazed glaze. Li Jiazhi, Deng Zequn and Xu Jiming, "Technical Studies and Replication of Guan Ware, an Ancient Chinese Ceramic," *MRS Bulletin* 26, no. 1 (January 2001): 31.

<sup>5</sup> Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," 19–20, 23.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Goodman, *How to be a Victorian* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Julia Krueger, "Prairie Pots and Beyond: An Examination of Saskatchewan Ceramics from the 1960s to Present" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2006), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Garth Clark, "Voukos' Dilemma: Toward a Ceramic Canon," in *Shards*, ed. John Pagliaro (New York: Distributed Art Publications, 2003), 317–327.

<sup>9</sup> Gail Crawford, *Studio Ceramics in Canada* (Toronto: Goose Lane Editions, 2005), Sandra Alföldy and Rachel Gotlieb, *On the Table: 100 Years of Functional Ceramics in Canada* (Toronto: Gardiner Museum, 2007), and Timothy Long, ed., *Regina Clay: Worlds in the Making* (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Alberta Art Foundation, *Studio Ceramics in Alberta 1947–1952* (Edmonton: Alberta Art Foundation, 1982); Alberta Art Foundation, *Studio Ceramics in Alberta, II 1953–1963* (Edmonton: Alberta Art Foundation, 1982); Alberta Art Foundation, *Alberta Clay Comes of Age: Studio Ceramics in Alberta III 1964–1984* (Edmonton: Alberta Art Foundation, 1986).

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- <sup>11</sup> Alison Calder, "Sense and Place," in *Scratching the Surface: The Post-Prairie Landscape*, ed. Steven Matijcio (Winnipeg: Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, 2007), 12.
- <sup>12</sup> Calder, "Sense and Place," 12.
- <sup>13</sup> Calder, "Sense and Place," 14–15.
- <sup>14</sup> Margaret Atwood, "Canadian Monsters," in *The Canadian Imagination: Dimensions of a Literary Culture*, ed. David Staines (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 111.
- <sup>15</sup> The difference between a field and a discipline is articulated by Yale University Art Professor, Jules David Prown, who defines a "field" as a subject of investigation and a "discipline" as a mode of investigation. Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," in *Art as Evidence: Writing on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 70.
- <sup>16</sup> Prown, "Mind in Matter," 69–95.
- <sup>17</sup> Gill Saunders, *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 2002) and Catherine Horwood, *Potted History: The Story of Plants in the Home* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2007).
- <sup>18</sup> Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1958; Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001).
- <sup>19</sup> Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov, eds., *Blobjects & Beyond: The New Fluidity in Design* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005).
- <sup>20</sup> Mireille Perron – *The Anatomy of a Glass Menagerie: Altglass* was on display from January 31, 2019 to April 13, 2019 at Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB. The exhibition was curated by Chief Curator Christine Sowiak and included an exhibition catalogue.
- <sup>21</sup> Janet Koplos and Bruce Metcalf, *Makers: A History of American Studio Craft* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
- <sup>22</sup> Jeannine Falino and Jennifer Scanlan, eds., *Crafting Modernism: Midcentury American Art and Design* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2011).
- <sup>23</sup> Crawford, *Studio Ceramics in Canada*; Rosalyn J. Morrison, *Canadian Glassworks 1970–1990* (Toronto: Ontario Crafts Council, 1990); Sandra Alföldy, *The Allied Arts: Architecture and Craft in Postwar Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012); and Rachel Gotlieb and Michael Prokopow, *True Nordic: How Scandinavia Influenced Design in Canada* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2017).
- <sup>24</sup> Gail Crawford, *A Fine Line: Studio Crafts in Ontario from 1930 to the Present* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1998); and Diane Carr and Nancy Janovicek, *Back to the Land: Ceramics from Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands 1970–1985* (Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2012).
- <sup>25</sup> Sandra Alföldy, *Crafting Identity: The Development of Professional Fine Craft in Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).
- <sup>26</sup> Karen Harvey, "Introduction: Practical Matters," in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternate Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 3.
- <sup>27</sup> Elaine Cheasley Paterson and Susan Surette, eds., *Sloppy Craft: Postdisciplinarity and the Crafts* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).
- <sup>28</sup> Allan Collier, *The Modern Eye: Craft and Design in Canada 1940–1980* (Victoria: The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2011).
- <sup>29</sup> Harvey, "Introduction," 2.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>31</sup> I am indebted to Brent Wiancko who in 2011 coined the term "object-inspired" during a *HIS9834B History of Things: An Introduction to Material Culture* seminar discussion.
- <sup>32</sup> Prown, "Mind in Matter," 70.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 79–80.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 81–82.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.
- <sup>36</sup> Jules Prown, "Style as Evidence," in *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 65.
- <sup>37</sup> Prown, "Mind in Matter," 83–84.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.
- <sup>39</sup> Prown, "Style as Evidence," 53.
- <sup>40</sup> Jules Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?" in *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 223.
- <sup>41</sup> Glenn Adamson, "The case of the missing footstool: Reading the absent object," in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 202.

- <sup>42</sup> Note: volumes 1 and 2 were edited by Paula Gustafson. Tragically, Gustafson passed away before completing her work on volume 3 which was then completed by Nisse Gustafson and Amy Gogarty. Paula Gustafson, ed., *Craft Perception and Practice: A Canadian Discourse*, vol. 1 (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2002); Paula Gustafson, ed., *Craft Perception and Practice: A Canadian Discourse*, vol. 2 (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2005); and Paula Gustafson, Nisse Gustafson & Amy Gogarty, eds., *Craft Perception and Practice: A Canadian Discourse*, vol. 3 (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2007).
- <sup>43</sup> Gustafson, *Craft Perception and Practice*, vol. 2, 1.
- <sup>44</sup> Paul Greenhalgh expressed concerns regarding the validity of grouping such varied disciplines under the term “craft” in his introductory essay to the book *The Persistence of Craft: The Applied Arts Today*. Paul Greenhalgh, “Introduction: Craft in a Changing World,” in *The Persistence of Craft: The Applied Arts Today*, ed. Paul Greenhalgh (London, England: A & C Black (Publishers) Ltd., 2002), 1–17.
- <sup>45</sup> Koplos and Metcalf, *Makers*, 1.
- <sup>46</sup> Larry Shiner, “The Fate of Craft,” in *NeoCraft: Modernity and the Crafts*, ed. Sandra Alfoldy (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2007), 34.
- <sup>47</sup> Maria Elena Buszek, “Introduction,” in *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.
- <sup>48</sup> M. Anna Fariello, “Making and Naming: The Lexicon of Studio Craft,” in *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 27.
- <sup>49</sup> Shiner, “The Fate of Craft,” 34–35.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.
- <sup>51</sup> Much has been written on the darker side of both Yanagi and Leach’s ideas of “tradition” in light of Japan’s occupation of Korea and the equating of simple design with the Korean people. Edmund de Waal, “Homo Orientalis: Bernard Leach and the Japanese Soul,” in *Obscure Objects of Desire: Reviewing the Crafts in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Tanya Harrod (London: Crafts Council, 1997), 117–125 and Shiner, “The Fate of Craft,” 36.
- <sup>52</sup> Donald Buchanan, *First National Fine Crafts Exhibition* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1957), n.p. Others who used the term “fine crafts”: Moncrieff Williamson, *Canadian Fine Crafts* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1967) and *Norah McCullough and Daniel Rhodes, Canadian Fine Crafts 1966/67* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1966).
- <sup>53</sup> Alfoldy, *Crafting Identity*, 4.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.
- <sup>56</sup> Bruce Metcalf, “Contemporary Craft: A Brief Overview,” in *Exploring Contemporary Craft: History, Theory & Critical Writing*, ed. Jean Johnson (Toronto: Coach House Books and Harbourfront Centre, 2002), 18.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>58</sup> Koplos and Metcalf, *Makers*, 213.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.
- <sup>61</sup> Alfoldy, *Crafting Identity*, 17.
- <sup>62</sup> Fariello, “Making and Naming,” 39.
- <sup>63</sup> Shiner, “The Fate of Craft,” 37.
- <sup>64</sup> Alfoldy, *Crafting Identity*, 7.
- <sup>65</sup> Maria Elena Buszek, ed., *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) and Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007).
- <sup>66</sup> Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 4.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.
- <sup>72</sup> For example see: Tanya Harrod, “House-trained Objects: Notes Towards Writing an Alternative History of Modern Art,” in *Contemporary Art in the Home*, ed. Colin Painter (Oxford, England: Berg, 2002), 55–74 and Tag Gronberg, “Speaking Volumes: The Pavillion de l’Esprit Nouveau,” *Oxford Art Journal* 15, no. 2 (1992): 58–69.
- <sup>73</sup> Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 69.
- <sup>74</sup> Jenni Sorkin, *Live Form: Women, Ceramics, and Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 1.
- <sup>75</sup> Sorkin, *Live Form*, 19.
- <sup>76</sup> Sorkin, *Live Form*, 5.
- <sup>77</sup> Marguerite Wildenhain, *Pottery: Form and Expression* (New York: American Craftsmen’s Council, 1959), 57.



- <sup>78</sup> Sorkin, *Live Form*, 4, 11 and 13.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>80</sup> Ezra Shales, *The Shape of Craft* (London: Reaktion Books, 2017), 21.
- <sup>81</sup> Fariello, "Making and Naming," 40.
- <sup>82</sup> Glenn Adamson, "Introduction," *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2010), 2.
- <sup>83</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, "Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture," *Art Bulletin* 77, no. 4 (December 1995): 541.
- <sup>84</sup> Paul Mathieu, "But is it (Ceramic) Art? Ceramics and the 'Problem' with Jean-Pierre Larocque's Exhibition at the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art," in *Craft Perception and Practice: a Canadian Discourse*, volume III, ed. Paula Gustafson, Nisse Gustafson and Amy Gogarty (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2007), 116.
- <sup>85</sup> Koen Vanderstukken, *Glass: Virtual, Real* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2016), 61–63.
- <sup>86</sup> For a detailed list of Cicansky's exhibitions and bibliography see those specific sections, compiled by myself, of the *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener's Universe* exhibition catalogue.
- <sup>87</sup> Donald Kerr, *The Garden of Art: Vic Cicansky Sculptor* (Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2004) and Victor Cicansky, *Up From Garlic Flats* (Regina: Radiant Press, 2019).
- <sup>88</sup> Maija Bismanis, *The Continental Clay Connection* (Regina: Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, 1980).
- <sup>89</sup> Bismanis, *The Continental Clay Connection*, 13–17.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 59–60.
- <sup>91</sup> Bruce W. Ferguson, "Victor Cicansky: The Garden as Vessel," in *Victor Cicansky: Clay Sculpture* (Regina: Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, 1983), 17.
- <sup>92</sup> Carol A. Phillips, "Cicansky's Imagery: A Personal Note," in *Victor Cicansky: Clay Sculpture* (Regina: Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, 1983), 27.
- <sup>93</sup> The Regina Clay Ceramists are Lorne Beug, Victor Cicansky, Joe Fafard (1942–2019), David Gilhooly (1943–2013), Ricardo Gómez, Beth Hone (1918–2011), Ann James (1925–2011), Margaret Keelan, Marilyn Levine (1935–2005), Lorraine Malach (1933–2003), Maija Peeples-Bright, Jack Sures (1934–2018), David Thauberger and Russell Yuristy.
- <sup>94</sup> Timothy Long, "Regina Clay: Worlds in the Making," in *Regina Clay: Worlds in the Making*, ed. Timothy Long (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2005), 45.
- <sup>95</sup> Long, "Regina Clay," 45.
- <sup>96</sup> Susan Surette, "Canadian Ceramic Relief Murals: Studio Craft and Architecture – A Case Study of the Sturdy-Stone Centre Murals, 1975–1983" (PhD diss., Concordia University, 2014), [https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/979031/1/Surette\\_PhD\\_F2014.pdf](https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/979031/1/Surette_PhD_F2014.pdf), accessed April 19, 2020.
- <sup>97</sup> Julia Krueger, "Victor Cicansky's Crafted Path," in *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener's Universe*, eds. Timothy Long and Julia Krueger (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2019), 99–129.
- <sup>98</sup> Julia Krueger and Timothy Long, curators, *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener's Universe*, MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK (June 8, 2019–October 23, 2019), Confederation Centre of the Arts, Charlottetown, PE (January 25–April 26, 2020) and Glenbow Museum, Calgary, AB (opening June 2020).
- <sup>99</sup> Diana Nemiroff to Victor Cicansky, August 15, 1997, "Victor Cicansky. Personal and Professional Papers. 1953–2000," 2005-53, box 7, folder 92, University of Regina Archives and Special Collections, Regina, SK.
- <sup>100</sup> Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 39.
- <sup>101</sup> Pennina Barnett, "folds, fragments, surfaces: towards a poetics of cloth," in *Textures of Memory: The Poetics of Cloth*, 25–34, (Nottingham: Angel Row Gallery, 1999); George Nakashima, *The Soul of a Tree: A Woodworker's Reflections* (New York: Kodansha, 1981); and Koen Vanderstukken, *Glass*, 61–63.
- <sup>102</sup> Adamson, "The Case of the Missing Footstool," 192–207.
- <sup>103</sup> There are numerous examples of the retelling of this mythic creation story including Karen S. Chambers, "Clearly Inspired: Contemporary Glass and its Origins," in *Clearly Inspired Contemporary Glass and Its Origins*, Karen S. Chambers and Tina Oldknow (San Francisco, CA: Pomegranate Communications, Inc., 1999), 31. For use of the term "big bang" see Sebby Wilson Jacobson, "Glass' Big Bang," *American Craft* 72, no. 1 (Feb/Mar 2012): 42–50. It is also worth pointing out that a number of publications have complicated the mythic creation story of studio glass including, but not limited to: Patricia Failing, "Studio Glass, 1945–1969," in *Crafting Modernism: Midcentury American Art and Design*, ed. Jeannine Falino (Abrams, NY: Museum of Arts and Design, 2012), 246–256 and Martha Drexler Lynn, *American Studio Glass: 1960–1990* (Manchester, VT: Hudson Hills Press, 2004).
- <sup>104</sup> Hugh Tait, ed., *Five Thousand Years of Glass*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
- <sup>105</sup> Dan Klein, *Artists in Glass: Late Twentieth Century Masters in Glass* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 2001) and Peter Layton, *Glass Art* (London: A & C Black, 1996).
- <sup>106</sup> Peter Layton, *Glass Art* (London: A & C Black, 1996), 106. For a discussion on how-to writing and its connection to craft see Glenn Adamson, "How-To: Section Introduction," in *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 9–10.

- <sup>107</sup> Lucartha Kohler, "In the beginning: Herstory," in *Women Working in Glass* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2003), 8–27.
- <sup>108</sup> Corning Museum of Glass, "New Glass Review," <https://www.cmog.org/research/publications/new-glass-review>, accessed May 5, 2020; and Urban Glass Quarterly, "About Glass Quarterly," <https://urbanglass.org/glass/detail/about>, accessed May 5, 2020.
- <sup>109</sup> Blanche Craig, *Contemporary Glass* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2008).
- <sup>110</sup> William Warmus, *Fire and Form: The Art of Contemporary Glass* (West Palm Beach: Norton Museum of Art, 2003).
- <sup>111</sup> Warmus, *Fire and Form*, 9 and 107.
- <sup>112</sup> John Garrison, *Glass* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).
- <sup>113</sup> Vanderstukken, *Glass*.
- <sup>114</sup> Lynn, *American Studio Glass*.
- <sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 1–4.
- <sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 12.
- <sup>117</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>118</sup> Gerald Stevens, *Early Canadian Glass* (Toronto: Coles Publishing Company Limited, 1979) and Gerald Stevens, *Glass in Canada: The First One Hundred Years* (Toronto: Methuen, 1982).
- <sup>119</sup> J. Victor Owen, "Geochemical Characterization of Alleged Mallorytown Glass (c. 1839–40) in the Royal Ontario Museum and Its Distinction from Contemporary Upstate New York Glassware," *Canadian Journal of Archaeology* 27 (2003): 290.
- <sup>120</sup> Stevens, *Early Canadian Glass*, 8.
- <sup>121</sup> Derek McNaney and Ann McNaney, *Swan Song: The Story of Altglass with a Guide to Identification & Values* (Red Deer: privately printed, 2005), 7–11.
- <sup>122</sup> McNaney and McNaney, *Swan Song*.
- <sup>123</sup> Mary Coward, *Altglass: Manufacturers of Hand Made Glass* (Edmonton: privately printed, 2003).
- <sup>124</sup> Bruno Andrus, "In the Spectacle: Canadian Artistic Glass at Expo 67," *Cahiers métiers d'art :: Craft Journal* 6, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 25–38. For historical information on Chalet Artistic Glass see Conrad Biernacki, "Chalet Glass," *Antique67.com*, <http://www.antique67.com/articles.php?article=79>, accessed May 9, 2020.
- <sup>125</sup> Dan Klein, *Glass: A Contemporary Art* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989).
- <sup>126</sup> Klein, *Glass*, 190–199.
- <sup>127</sup> Morrison, *Canadian Glassworks*.
- <sup>128</sup> Catherine Siermacheski, "Not So Fragile: An Ethnography of Women Glass Blowers in Western Canada" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2013), <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0073887>, accessed May 9, 2020.
- <sup>129</sup> Julia Krueger, "Shattering the Canon: Spinning a Discourse," *Cahiers métiers d'art :: Craft Journal* 6, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 88–101.
- <sup>130</sup> The film is a two-minute clip of Marty Kaufman blowing glass at the Alberta College of Art (ACA). Kaufman recalls that the clip was made in c. 1979 by the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) as part of a larger promotional film for ACA. However, more research is needed in order to discover the title of the promotional film and all other relevant information.
- <sup>131</sup> David Surman, "Videogames and the Neo-Baroque," (lecture, The Neo-Baroque Revisited, Museum London, London, Ontario, October 13, 2011).
- <sup>132</sup> Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*.
- <sup>133</sup> Holt and Skov, *Blobjects & Beyond*.
- <sup>134</sup> Julia Krueger, "Narratives of a Reflective Virtuality: Re-activating Altglass' Menagerie," in *Mireille Perron – The Anatomy of a Glass Menagerie: Altglass*, ed. Christine Sowiak (Calgary: Nickle Galleries, 2019), 8–21.
- <sup>135</sup> Vanderstukken, *Glass*, 61.
- <sup>136</sup> Garth Clark, "How Envy Killed the Crafts [2008]," in *The Craft Reader*, edited by Glenn Adamson (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 445–453; and Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

## Chapter 1

### Of Thread and Branches: Victor Cicansky's Crafted Path

“Craft has always been a supremely messy word.”<sup>1</sup> – Paul Greenhalgh

“We all come from clay and we all return to clay. It has the stuff of life and death about it.”<sup>2</sup> – Victor Cicansky



**Figure 2** Victor Cicansky, *Stony Rapids with Plum*, 1997. Bronze, patina, acrylic paint, glass, 40.6 x 61.0 x 61.0 cm. Collection: Mary Ann Czekanski. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and MacKenzie Art Gallery.

On May 14, 1997, Regina, Saskatchewan artist Victor Cicansky sent an invitation to the curator of contemporary art at the National Gallery of Canada (NGC), Diana Nemiroff, inviting her to view his solo exhibition, *The Heart of the Garden*, at the Mira Godard Gallery in Toronto. At this point in his career, Cicansky had received a Bachelor of Education from the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, SK (1965); taught various subjects in elementary school and art classes in high school in Regina in the 1960s; received a Bachelor of Arts Degree from the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus in Regina (1967); received a Master of Fine Arts from the University of California Davis, in Davis, California (1970); taught art education and fine art at the University of Regina from 1970 to 1993; completed major public ceramic mural commissions including *The Old Working Class* for Saskatoon's Sturdy Stone Centre (1978) and *The Garden Fence* for the cafeteria of the CBC Building in Regina (1984); presented 24 solo exhibitions, including his 1983 solo exhibition which toured nationally and was accompanied by a

catalogue; and participated in numerous national and international group exhibitions.<sup>3</sup> Along with other makers, including Lorne Beug, Joe Fafard (1942–2019), David Gilhooly (1943–2013), Ann James (1925–2011), Lorraine Malach (1933–2003), Jack Sures (1934–2018), and David Thauberger, who were all associated with the 1970s Regina Clay scene and the back-to-the-land movement, Cicansky was instrumental in using ceramic sculpture to insert personal narrative, fantastical alternative worlds, and a sense of place into the Regina art community which was at that point in time dominated by a specific interpretation of New York Abstract Expressionism.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it was not out of place for Cicansky to extend a personal invitation to a curator from the NGC. He stated: “The last contact I had with the National Gallery was over two decades ago when Jessica Bradley came to my studio in Craven [Saskatchewan]. A lot has happened since then. I am now in Regina, way west of Ottawa. It’s here where I live, work and garden. The landscape of art making here has changed as dramatically as the climate.”<sup>5</sup> *The Heart of the Garden* showcased a new level of rugged complexity in Cicansky’s bronze tables (fig. 2) and bonsais (fig. 3) that came about after spending a summer in northern Saskatchewan, and Cicansky was eager to share this deeper understanding of material and place with the NGC.



**Figure 3** Victor Cicansky, *Stony Rapids Sunrise*, 1996. Bronze, patina, acrylic paint, 73.6 x 76.2 x 61.0 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

In July, Cicansky received a short reply from Janice Seline, assistant curator of contemporary art:

Diana Nemiroff asked me to reply to your letter as she is travelling for an extended period. Thank you for letting us know of your exhibition - I did happen to be in Toronto before it opened and I glimpsed it being unpacked. Regretfully I was not able to see it complete. Because of your representation with Mira Godard and other dealers we have been able to follow your production, even though there has been little direct contact between us. I am sorry to say that our collection and your work would seem to have taken different paths and that this state of affairs is likely to continue, given the limitations on our purchase programme. We appreciate hearing from you, however, and hope that the show in Toronto was a success.<sup>6</sup>

Later that month, Cicansky sent another letter to Nemiroff asking for copies of the annual report and mandate and for a list of contemporary Canadian art purchased within the last five years accompanied by the policies and procedures supporting those purchases. His final request involved a clarification on Seline's use of the word "path": "Perhaps you could provide me with the corporate policy that articulates the path the Gallery is on and your interpretation of how this path diverges from my own. I would also be most interested in your analysis on what path you believe my work has taken."<sup>7</sup>

Nemiroff replied in August to Cicansky and provided him with the information he requested. She reiterated the budgetary restraints of the NGC that Seline had mentioned and explained the gallery was currently focused on collecting photography and film. In the letter, Nemiroff listed a number of issues she understood to be of particular importance to contemporary Canadian art at that time including gender, the interrelationship of different cultures (high/low and western/non-western), representational critique, and questions of place. She also directly discussed Cicansky's "path":

In thinking about your work, it seems to me that one issue that may have preoccupied you at one time is that of the relationship of sculptural and craft traditions, and particularly the slippage that exists between such categories in clay work. Other than that, I see your work as essentially bucolic, occasionally humourous, and coming out of and giving expression to the rural or agrarian side in what we might describe as a rural/urban split. It cannot be denied that most of the issues that I have enumerated above, apart from that about place and location, which is concerned with just such splits, belong largely to an urban perspective. If there is a struggle in aesthetics today, it could be said to centre around such oppositions as direct expression versus mediated representation, the handmade versus the manufactured, and the located vision of the rural versus the restless perspective of the urban.<sup>8</sup>

In October, Cicansky replied to Nemiroff's critique by explaining the relationship between sculptural and craft traditions "has never been an issue" in his work and while studying art at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus, clay was "not considered an appropriate medium for high art. That attitude was sufficient motivation for me to employ it."<sup>9</sup> He took issue with Nemiroff's characterization of his work as bucolic and agrarian by pointing out that it reflects on his experiences growing up in the east end of Regina (think place and high/low culture): "While it is true, *Singing the Joys of the Agrarian Society* was a title I used for a work from the outhouse series I created in the early seventies, it was a tongue in cheek title. It was inspired by the outhouse we used when I was a boy."<sup>10</sup> He also pointed out that his garden was an urban one and not something found in the country. It was and still is an extension of his studio where he contemplates larger questions: does rural life exist anymore, are cities natural, what is natural, and what is man-made? He closed by politely declining the offer for a studio visit, conceding "his work is not compatible with the current collecting strategies of the National Gallery."<sup>11</sup>

Cicansky was right in terms of compatibility. Craft and art in the 1990s were for the most part operating in separate spheres and defined by materials (clay, glass, fibre, wood, and certain metals<sup>12</sup>) and types of objects (functional, domestic, and decorative): art galleries were for art and museums were for craft and other forms of material culture. In Cicansky's case, the curators at the NGC could not look past his material roots in clay. Even though *The Heart of the Garden* exhibited bronze bonsais growing from vessel-shaped forms replete with bronze fruit and stones (fig. 3) and functional tables designed for domestic use, to them, his path was and always would be clay and by default craft.

Craft is notoriously tricky to define as the meaning of the word is culturally, socially and historically contingent.<sup>13</sup> Jeweler and craft historian Bruce Metcalf has even pointed out the meaning is easily tailored to fit the needs of individuals and groups.<sup>14</sup> This chapter has already narrowed in on one possible definition prevalent during the 1990s that was formulated around materials and types of objects. However, this narrow understanding of craft no longer dominates the discourse. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century came to a close, theorists and makers within the field started to expand and complicate the definition of craft from one based on types of objects made out of certain materials to

craft as a way of doing things and being within the world. *Thinking Through Craft* by American theorist Glenn Adamson was published in 2007 and provides a useful definition for the more complex and open understanding of craft that currently dominates the field:

Rather than presenting craft as a fixed set of things—pots, rather than paintings—this book will analyze it as an approach, an attitude, or a habit of action. Craft only exists in motion. It is a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institutions, or people. It is also multiple: an amalgamation of interrelated core principles, which are put into relation with one another through the overarching idea of “craft.”<sup>15</sup>

This relational and action-based definition is particularly suitable to an object-inspired study of a maker’s practice, in this case Cicansky’s, that spans multiple decades, materials, and types of objects. It’s no longer about categorizing Cicansky and arguing about where he fits into any particular cannon; a craft-based approach to contemplating his oeuvre weaves a fruitful pathway through his various bodies of work.

One of the core principles of craft in Adamson’s text is material, and he states that craft “always entails an encounter with the properties of a specific medium.”<sup>16</sup> For this particular investigation, I will build upon Adamson’s statement as follows: craft is a sustained engagement on a physical and metaphorical level with materials and the subsequent discipline-related constraints associated with those materials. When adopting a retrospective view of Cicansky’s oeuvre, material encounter follows material encounter (at times putting him at odds with the rules or constraints of ceramics). Subsequently, craft might provide one of the more productive ways of thinking through Cicansky as a maker and artist. It makes sense to do this as Cicansky’s roots are craft-based; he did after all take pottery courses from Patricia Leigh Wiens (1932–2018), Beth Hone (1918–2011), and Jack Sures (1934–2018) at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus. In fact, I would go so far as to argue that in light of the expanded definition of craft, Cicansky has always been a craftsperson, and it is this very position that makes his work politically subversive, difficult to place, and powerfully affective. Encountering Cicansky’s work through craft weaves a complexity into his practice. This conceptual complexity is achieved by examining these craft-based encounters which illustrate Cicansky’s deep understanding of his chosen materials.

With respect to Canadian craft and ceramics criticism, Nemiroff's no-holds-barred critique of Cicansky's work is a rare example of a critique by someone not directly associated with craft, ceramics, or, for that matter, Saskatchewan. Ceramic curator and critic Garth Clark astutely points out "for decades the tradition in craft was to have a close friend, and fellow crafter write one's reviews. Crafters have written most of the books, curated the bulk of the exhibitions, organized the conferences. Little light was shone on craft from without, much to its detriment."<sup>17</sup> While Nemiroff might not be intimately associated with craft or the ceramics community, she is still a curator, someone highly skilled in interpreting visual culture, and her use of the words "clay work" to describe Cicansky's early sculptural objects is telling as she does not associate him with the field of ceramics by classifying the early objects as "ceramic sculptures" or more broadly as "ceramics." To ceramic theorists such as Paul Mathieu, this might indicate Nemiroff's lack of a discipline-specific<sup>18</sup> understanding: "I would argue that among all art forms, ceramics has the least common ground with sculpture. No other art form uses the same word to describe the material it uses and the art form (the specific discipline) itself...In fact, there is NO clay in ceramics. Once fired, clay is a totally different material, physically, chemically, esthetically, any way you want to look at it."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the use of the noun "clay" to describe Cicansky's finished ceramic objects made of fired clay/ceramic, might indicate a lack of understanding or the beginnings of a new way of understanding Cicansky's work via material and craft. Cicansky himself took up this focus on material in his October reply to Nemiroff when he discussed how he came to clay, his engagement with the material while in California, and that his work was never about the relationship between sculpture and craft traditions.<sup>20</sup>

In this chapter, I will use Nemiroff's response as a jumping off point for an analysis of Cicansky's use of materials and his respective processes and motivations. A sustained engagement with material (a defining act of a craftsman) on a physical and metaphorical level and the constraints associated with a specific craft-related discipline (ceramics) is a constant within Cicansky's practice. This chapter is loosely organized chronologically, and in each section, I highlight a small body of work and analyze it via the materials and processes used, drawing together the work of distinct theorists for each change in Cicansky's method. In each section, I further choose a different metaphor or



lens through which to view Cicansky's work. These lenses include process and Cicansky's approach to vessel making; metaphor and Cicansky's use of textiles; allegory and Cicansky's use of house framing techniques and wood; and finally, virtuality and Cicansky's use of glass and honouring the soul of a tree or bush. Through this analysis I move away from the more traditional framings of garden, place, and region that are used to analyze Cicansky's work.<sup>21</sup> As a whole, this chapter will demonstrate how craft is an approach that holds together each of Cicansky's series of work and his entire oeuvre as his decades-long engagement with material also mirrors the ever-evolving definition of craft in North America since the Second World War. In short, perhaps Nemiroff was not all together incorrect with her points on materiality but she vastly underestimated the conceptual potential of craft and its place within the NGC. In fact, craft and its ever-evolving definition provides focus and brings new conceptual, historical, and material understanding to one of Regina Clay's most significant and prolific members.

### **By Way of Process: Cicansky as (Reformed) Potter**

"Today, while these traditions [of craft serving a functional or domestic purpose] continue, from time to time a craftsman will create a work which transcends the restrictions of form and function."<sup>22</sup> – Moncreif Williamson

"Something was driving me to find my own voice and to express it. I began by questioning the fundamentals of pottery: function and truth to materials. The first questioning works were non-functional mugs, kitchen jars and casseroles."<sup>23</sup> – Victor Cicansky



**Figure 4** Victor Cicansky, *Wine Set*, 1967. Stoneware, glaze, flask: 22.5 x 9.7 cm; cups: 5.5 x 5.9 cm (approx.). Collection: Confederation Art Centre Art Gallery. Purchased, 1967. CM-67-1-71 a-g. Photo: Louise Vessey, Confederation Art Centre Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and Confederation Art Centre Art Gallery.

The first method I will explore involves process and material constraints or rules. I begin at the start of Cicansky's career as a potter and focus on some ceramic pots that were included in two important 1967 group exhibitions: *Canadian Fine Crafts* in Montreal, QC and *Vic Cicansky and Don Chester* in Regina, SK. The pots included in these two exhibitions signal a major shift at the end of the 1960s that took place in Cicansky's approach, as a potter, to clay (figs. 4 & 5).

The *Canadian Fine Crafts* exhibition was curated by Moncrief Williamson (1915–1996), former Extension Services curator at the Art Gallery of Victoria, BC, former director of the Art Department at the Glenbow Foundation (now Glenbow Museum) in Calgary, AB and, at that time, director of the Confederation Centre Art Gallery in Charlottetown, PE [PEI].<sup>24</sup> It was one of six commissioned survey exhibitions intended to showcase Canada's visual culture to the world during Expo 67.<sup>25</sup> The range of work on display in the Canada Pavillion included approximately 36 paintings by artists such as Cornelius Krieghoff (1815–1870), Emily Carr (1871–1945), the Group of Seven, and contemporary Pop Artists; over one hundred photographs by Yousuf Karsh (1908–2002); a graphic arts exhibition; and the fine crafts exhibition.<sup>26</sup> *Canadian Fine Crafts* included over 120 makers and featured over 170 objects ranging from stained and fused glass to enameling, jewellery, ceramics, weavings, applique work, printed yardage, and wood carvings. Significantly, while an independent show, the craft exhibition was located

in the Canadian Pavilion *with* the exhibitions of painting, graphics, sculpture, photography, and architecture.<sup>27</sup> Former secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, Dorothy Todd Hénaut, remarked in the *artscanada* article, “1967 – The Moment of Truth for Canadian Crafts,” that “the exhibition which will make a more immediate impact on the international scene is the fine crafts section of the Canadian Pavilion at Expo 67...Here the crafts will be displayed in an area adjacent to Canadian paintings and graphics, sculpture, photography and architecture, as an integral part of the Canadian cultural fabric.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, unlike the current state of affairs (much the same as in 1997) where Canada’s national collection of craft is housed at the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Quebec and, across the river, the national art collection is located in Ottawa, Ontario at the NGC, the art/craft split was not so physically distant during the 1967 Expo celebrations.

Displaying all these types of visual culture under one contemporary modernist roof, spatially reflected, through proximity, craft’s changing status within the art world as craft continued to make its way into university curricula<sup>29</sup> and to develop professional craft-related support organizations across the country.<sup>30</sup> However, though an art/craft split (which can easily be interpreted as a hierarchical split) did not manifest in the form of physically separate pavilions, the exhibition was nonetheless dedicated to establishing the importance of Canadian craft rather than collapsing craft into art as *Canadian Fine Crafts* was a separate exhibition within the Canada Pavilion. In short, it cannot be understated how important this exhibition was for the definition of craft in Canada at this time as the objects included in *Canadian Fine Crafts* illustrated and made tangible a definition of craft based on objects made out of certain *types* of materials. In the case of ceramics, this was even more pronounced as the majority of the ceramic works were stoneware.

Professor of Craft History, Sandra Alföldy wrote extensively on this exhibition and pointed out Williamson’s selection of objects was “a careful blend of utilitarian function, playful representation, and artistic conceptualization.”<sup>31</sup> Williamson was keenly aware of craft’s changing identity and role when he noted in the *Canadian Fine Crafts* catalogue there were craftspeople who created work that transcended the rules associated with form and function, and he included some of those makers in the exhibition.<sup>32</sup>

Alberta’s Ed Drahančuk’s large-scale stoneware vessels exemplify this type of maker as

his vessels can also be read as sculpture.<sup>33</sup> However, Alföldy has rightly noted that Williamson did not include counter culture craft from the West Coast, and he also vastly underrepresented the Maritime provinces as he felt the crafted objects from this part of the country were still too closely tied to “hobby craft production.”<sup>34</sup> A quick count of the list of makers included in the catalogue reveals the majority of the makers were from Quebec—39 in total—and most troubling of all, there was only one anonymous basket included from the entire northern region of Canada and its inclusion was justified as follows: “Eskimo Crafts from the North West Territories are represented in this exhibition by one example of basketry from the Great Whale River as an indication of the variety found in this region.”<sup>35</sup> It appears, as like the Maritime provinces, craft from “the north” was not modern or “fine” enough for this exhibition, demonstrating that hierarchical distinctions along the lines of material, art, and modernity existed at the time, were perpetuated, and still exist to this day. The Prairie provinces were represented by 27 makers working in clay, fibre, enamel, metal, and leather, and Cicansky had two groups of objects included: a wine set (fig. 4) and two lidded jars (fig. 5).<sup>36</sup> The objects contrast with each other in so many ways that one might wonder if they were made by the same person. But their difference illustrates Cicansky’s engagement with the limits of clay, function, and craft—all conceptual underpinnings of a potter.



**Figure 5** Victor Cicansky, Lidded Jars, 1967. Stoneware, glaze, Frenchman sand, manganese, rutile, 23.8 x 14.4 x 14.4 cm and 29.3 x 16.9 x 16.9 cm. Collection: Confederation Art Centre Art Gallery, Purchased, 1967. CM 67.1.70 a,b and CM 67.1.70 cd. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.



**Figure 6** Jack Sures, *Casserole*, 1964. Engobe, stoneware, 12.4 x 20.9 x 20.6 cm. Collection of Burlington Art Centre. Donated by Patricia Rogal, 1994. 1994.051.0.2. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the Jack Sures Estate and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

As mentioned earlier, Cicansky received much of his early ceramic training from Jack Sures at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus. Sures, a dedicated vesselist, was committed to teaching his students how to throw good, functional pots on the wheel.<sup>37</sup> *Casserole* (fig. 6), dated a year before Sures' arrival at the University, is one such example, and is similar in form, surface treatment, and function to Sures' other vessels from the mid to late 1960s. It is a typical "brown and round" stoneware vessel from the 1960s influenced by the writings and teachings of English potter Bernard Leach (1887–1979), Japanese philosopher Sōetsu Yanagi (1889–1961), and Japanese potter Shōji Hamada (1894–1978), who all travelled across the United States in the early 1950s presenting demos and workshops which celebrated the "unknown craftsman," Zen, and an aesthetic based on historic Japanese folk craft and Korean ceramic wares.<sup>38</sup> Sures' casserole dish is glazed with earthy tones and decorated with linework, a favourite of contemporaneous American potters such as F. Carlton Ball (1911–1992) and Antonio Prieto (1912–1967). The form is balanced with a fluidity of line that moves from the foot, to the body, to the shoulder, and finally to the flange of this functional vessel. The lip of the lid fits snugly into the gallery of the jar; it won't swim around. The knob is easily graspable with ample room for the fingers to fit underneath while lifting the lid, and there are the visible marks of process in terms of the throwing lines. This is a well-made pot.

Cicansky's wine set is equally well made, reflecting Sures' teachings. The wine bottle, covered by a beautiful and functional oil spot tenmoku glaze that transitions from an iron rich brown along the body of the vessel to a shoulder and neck covered in lichen-

like spots of green, points to clay's malleable properties and upward fluidity when thrown on the wheel by way of those preserved throwing lines. The six cups, while all slightly different due to their handmade quality, fit easily into the hand, and their walls are an even thickness so as to avoid cracking during the drying and firing processes. In all, this is a well-made set of functional vessels, something well-suited to the modern home. Vessels such as these set the stage for Cicansky's later rejection of the functional, brown and round, Japanese-inspired aesthetic of the time.

Cicansky recalled of his early forays into pottery: "I found clay such a sensual medium and so easy to work with that I got seduced by the idea of becoming a potter."<sup>39</sup> In fact, he was a production potter for about 2.5 hours in 1966 when he worked for Jack and Lorraine Herman in Kleinburg, ON, attesting to his skill and ability to throw well-made, functional wares. However, after spending the morning throwing honey pots off the hump, Cicansky thanked the Hermans for the opportunity and returned to Saskatchewan. During that fateful morning, it became apparent to Cicansky rules and constraints were something he wanted to push against rather than live with. He wanted to question the fundamentals of pottery, which were to him function and truth to materials, and he could not do this while working as a production potter.

Truth to materials and function were already being questioned in the United States by potters such as Peter Voulkos (1924–2002). His over-the-top machismo approach to working with clay, while often shirtless for the camera, had a tremendous impact on the discipline, and his impact on Cicansky cannot be overlooked, especially when it comes to engaging with materials.<sup>40</sup> Popular periodical publications that often featured makers such as Voulkos played an important role within the history of Saskatchewan ceramics as they introduced additional processes, attitudes, and ideas to small communities of makers within the province. Cicansky remembered reading an article on Voulkos in *Ceramics Monthly* which inspired him to adopt a more antagonistic engagement with clay.<sup>41</sup> I have been unable to pinpoint the specific article, but I have narrowed it down to three possibilities. In the August 1957 issue of *Ceramics Monthly*, F. Carlton Ball reported on the ceramic sections of the American Craftsman's Council's first annual meeting at Asilomar, CA.<sup>42</sup> In this article, Ball quoted Voulkos: "When people talk about a set of values or a list of principles to govern design in pottery, I feel like perhaps I need to

apply for a license before I can make any pottery. I don't like to stick to rules for working. How can I say what I am trying to do? Is it necessary to know all the answers before one starts making a pot? I think not!"<sup>43</sup> It's easy to see how declarations such as this inspired Cicansky who was struggling with the rules and confines of pottery and ceramics. Closer to the time when Cicansky worked for the Hermans, Voulkos was mentioned in potter Stanley S. Walters' article "Stretch your Capabilities" where he discussed his experience attending a workshop conducted by Voulkos.<sup>44</sup> Walters reported that he was impressed with Voulkos' handling of the clay, and he even wedged on the floor! Consequently, Cicansky's untitled zipper vessel (fig.7) was antagonistically manipulated by way of floor work. Lastly, in the December 1966 issue of *Ceramics Monthly*, Voulkos was described by Janice Lovoss as follows: "In the '50s another potter, Peter Voulkos, broke with tradition in his own way and became an idol to his students. To many he still is 'the great one'."<sup>45</sup> The "great one's" more visceral approach to the handling of the material, his adaptation of unconventional working surfaces such as the floor, and his assertion that rules stifled creativity were a welcome departure from the way Cicansky was taught to engage with clay and how to act as a potter.



**Figure 7** Victor Cicansky, *Untitled (zippered vessel)*, c. 1968. Stoneware with fibreglass, whiting, glaze. Collection: Jeffrey Goudie. Photo: Don Hall, Mackenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

While it is impossible to definitively say which article it was that inspired Cicansky to start "breaking the rules," the point to take away from the three articles is an antagonistic approach to clay and the rules associated with its use and the discipline itself were of particular importance to Voulkos and subsequently Cicansky. Even before Cicansky left for California, thanks to a strong grounding in traditional pottery and

periodicals such as *Ceramics Monthly*, he started to critically engage with material and discipline constraints, something that is evident in the two dramatically different sets of vessels included in the *Canadian Fine Crafts* exhibition: wine set (fig. 4) and two lidded jars (fig. 5).

Knowledge of material and discipline constraints is integral to craft and the craftsperson. What exactly do I mean when I say “material constraints” or rules? Adamson argues that all materials are governed by a set of rules or material constraints.<sup>46</sup> In the case of working with clay, some of these rules include the following: if the walls of a vessel or sculpture are too thick and/or uneven the piece will crack due to uneven drying; clay must be completely dried out before it is fired otherwise it will explode in the kiln; and clay is best used when building vertically as opposed to horizontally as unsupported horizontality will lead to structural failure. Along with all of these material-specific rules, there are also discipline-specific constraints. Rules for American Studio Ceramics in the 1950s and 1960s included the following: fired clay is to be glazed with earth-toned colours; stoneware is favoured over earthenware; an object (and especially one that is functional) is to have a solid footing so it does not topple over; parts of a vessel are to transition smoothly from one to the next; wheel-throwing is preferred over hand building; and pots and potters are to pay homage to ceramics’ rich history as it was understood by figures such as British studio potter, teacher, and author Bernard Leach. For example, in *A Potter’s Book*, Leach includes illustrations of Chinese Sung Dynasty bottles, Japanese Seto stoneware, and English slipware by Thomas Toft (died 1698).<sup>47</sup> The way in which a maker approaches the material and the rules associated with the discipline of ceramics can be dramatically different as seen in *Red River*, c. 1960 by Voulkos<sup>48</sup> and *Vase*, 1959 by Warren MacKenzie (1924–2018) and Alix MacKenzie (1922–1962).<sup>49</sup> Warren MacKenzie, who was an apprentice of Leach and taught at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts while Cicansky was there in 1967, respectfully engaged within material and discipline constraints. His collaborative vase follows all the rules mentioned above: there is no cracking and it is covered in an earth-toned glaze, the stoneware walls are an even thickness, the parts of the vessel transition smoothly from one part to the next, the vessel’s foot provides a solid base, and the throwing lines indicate the vase is wheel thrown. On the other hand, Voulkos’ *Red River* is an entirely



different story as he antagonistically attacked those constraints to see just how far he could go: the object, which might be a vessel or might not, is wheel thrown *and* hand built with thick, uneven walls; it is covered haphazardly in slip, glaze and epoxy paint; and splashes of colour work against the form rather than with it as seen with the MacKenzie piece's delicate line work. By contrast, Volkos violently incised the surface of *Red River*; a similarly antagonistic attitude towards a material encounter and the discipline is present in Cicansky's early potted pieces.

Cicansky's shift or reformulation of a potter, pottery, and ceramics by way of an engagement with material and discipline constraints is striking, and this transition can be seen in the *Canadian Fine Crafts* pieces so astutely collected by Williamson. Take note of how from the wine set to the lidded jars, Cicansky abandoned glaze and instead rubbed oxides directly into the surface. The surfaces of the two lidded jars are cracked and dry—rough rather than smooth to the touch—and play directly with the material constraints surrounding surface treatments. The lidded jars appear malformed, possibly because they were kicked around a bit on the floor or at least paddled hard. The knobs on the lidded jars are ill-formed and no longer clearly read as knobs; instead they read as some type of popped pustule or gaping-mouth. Between the rough surface and the gaping-mouth knobs, the lidded jars demand attention from the user—a form of object agency—that is no longer full of the stereotypical aesthetic pleasantries associated with craft and handmade objects.

In order to really hammer home the point about breaking the “rules,” let's make a Saskatchewan comparison along the same lines as the Mackenzie and Voukos comparison and note the differences between Sures' *Casserole* (fig. 6) and Cicansky's *Lidded Jar* (fig. 5), between the work of teacher and student who were both included in *Canadian Fine Crafts*. For instance, focus on the lids and nobs of both functional objects. Cicansky's lid defiantly sits atop the lip of the vessel; it is not nestled into a gallery as seen in Sures' pot so as to avoid swimming around, a rule associated with well-made pots. The lack of a gallery and obvious flange demands care when picking up one of Cicansky's *Lidded Jars* and this demand, in breaking the rules associated with well-made pots, enhances the pot's agency or ability to impact the user's actions. The gaping-mouth knobs found on both of Cicansky's jars repel touch as they are awkward to grasp, with

barely enough room for fingers to curl around the undulating rough shapes, whereas the knob on Sures' lid invites touch with ample room and a smooth, glazed surface. The repelling of tactility in the Cicansky example is, once again, associated with breaking rules and object agency.



**Figure 8** Installation shot of *Vic Cicansky and Don Chester*, Regina Public Library, Regina, SK (November 24–December 14, 1967). Photo: Dunlop Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the Dunlop Art Gallery.

How did these abject, gaping-mouth knobs come about? I have already discussed Voulkos' influence in terms of an antagonistic approach to a material encounter, but it can be argued the lidded jars reflect Cicansky's career-spanning interest in plants, the garden, and his strength as an avid reader and researcher. Returning to *Ceramics Monthly*, in the same December 1966 issue that mentioned Voulkos, there was an article by Frank A. Colson titled "Cluster Pots" where he provided detailed instruction on how to throw and then combine numerous pots into organic clusters reminiscent of barnacles or plant forms.<sup>50</sup> Colson explained "When pots are joined together into a cluster of two or more, a visual effect is created that is quite unlike any other pottery form. A cluster of pots makes one thing of some of the forms found in nature."<sup>51</sup> At one point, Colson stressed the importance of "thrusting" the pots against one another in order to achieve variation and a feeling of spontaneity, a key feeling found in Voulkos' and Cicansky's processes. However, the thrust examples illustrated in Colson's article are nowhere near as spontaneous or alive-looking as the pots included in Cicansky's 1967 Regina Public Library exhibition titled *Vic Cicansky and Don Chester*, which included ample variations on the gaping mouth knobs (fig. 8).



**Figure 9** Victor Cicansky, *Soup Tureen*, 1967. Stoneware, 23.9 x 23.8 x 23.8 cm. Collection: SK Arts, C67.2. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery, [http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/sgc-cms/expositions-exhibitions/regina/\\_gallery/Cicansky-Soup/](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/sgc-cms/expositions-exhibitions/regina/_gallery/Cicansky-Soup/).

The *Vic Cicansky and Don Chester* exhibition contained pots that synthesized Cicansky's search for his own voice via his research into Voulkos' antagonistic approach to material encounters and his exposure to various techniques and processes highlighted in articles such as Colson's cluster pots in *Ceramics Monthly*. The exhibition included lidded vessels with gaping-mouth knobs similar to those found in the *Canadian Fine Crafts* exhibition; vase and casserole/tureens shapes (fig. 9) with clusters of pots for knobs; and torn open vessel or bag-like shapes with clusters of pots oozing out of them (fig. 10). While on the surface, it might appear as though Cicansky's search was leading towards sculpture (especially in terms of the negation of function), upon closer inspection his practice was and actually continues to be craft-based, thus enabling him to conceptually engage with materiality, constraints, and object agency.



**Figure 10** Installation shot of *Vic Cicansky and Don Chester*, Regina Public Library, Regina, SK (November 24–December 14, 1967). Photo: Dunlop Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the Dunlop Art Gallery.

Focusing on one of Cicansky's broken pots (fig. 11) reveals an approach to process that is crucial to his Davis work and development as a ceramist. His torn pots relate to vessels by Voulkos<sup>52</sup> and Robert Arneson.<sup>53</sup> The use of acrylic paint, à la Voulkos, highlights Cicansky's antagonistic, violent approach to working with clay. The garish red paint draws attention to the wounded pot and Cicansky's reformed potting process. The tear violates the object's vesselness, focusing attention on the expressive violent actions of tearing apart the wet clay and deforming the vessel, rather than on its function.



**Figure 11** Victor Cicansky, *Covered Jar with Red Incision*, 1967. Stoneware, glaze, paint, 26.7 x 16.5 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Katie Fitzrandolph described Cicansky's Regina Public Library pieces in a *Leader-Post* review as “pot-encrusted-pots”:

His larger pots are encrusted with smaller clay pot-forms to produce an extremely organic effect—almost as if they had an exotic tropical disease which one hopes is not catching...A couple of other works are bag-like shapes, slashed open and oozing more of the little pots. Generally, they give the feeling that if you came back in a few days, more little pot encrustations would have sprouted, and if you lived with it too long, you'd want to know a sure antidote for the day when little pots sprouted on your neck.<sup>54</sup>

Fitzrandolph astutely observed in her review how these infectious objects were filled with agency as they created a sense of contagion inside the viewer that unsettled the pots' presumed place within the domestic sphere, and it is important to note that craft and the

domestic sphere are intimately tied together. The torn brown and somewhat round glazed pot-encrusted-pots have pots spilling out of them. But these oozing pots are not typical pots, they are painted pots not glazed pots—it's like a sickness oozing from within...within the discipline of pottery itself. By creating objects that manifest a sense of contagion and a need for a cure within the domestic space, Cicansky was engaging with the constraints of craft, not sculpture. These pot-encrusted-pots see Cicansky evolve from the rule-following potter to a rule breaker.

### **By Way of Metaphor: Cicansky as Tailor**

“If the obsession is still with process and technique and surface, it's still a craft.”<sup>55</sup> – Robert Arneson

“The emphasis at Davis was to work from your own experience: beautiful and ugly, pleasurable and painful, humorous and absurd. That was right up my alley.”<sup>56</sup> – Victor Cicansky



**Figure 12** Victor Cicansky, *Stack of Cups*, 1968. Stoneware, glaze, 71.0 x 53.0 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

In 1967, Cicansky travelled to Haystack Mountain School of Crafts where he met Robert Arneson and Warren MacKenzie. As Cicansky recalled, his antagonistic approach to clay did not appeal to MacKenzie: “I argued a lot with Warren back then about making functional pots after showing slides of my non-functional ‘functional’ pot sculptures”<sup>57</sup> (fig. 12). Arneson was a different story as the two hit it off, and Arneson encouraged him to apply to grad school at the University of California, Davis (UCD), a state agricultural college, where Arneson taught ceramics. Cicansky took the advice, and at the end of

November 1967, he submitted a portfolio at the request of Roy DeForest (1930–2007) to UCD and was subsequently accepted into the graduate program.<sup>58</sup> Like Voulkos, Arneson was deeply involved with straining the constraints of clay and the discipline of ceramics, but unlike Voulkos who took an embodied aesthetic approach to his materially-driven antagonism, Arneson used humour, narrative, and contradiction when engaging with those same constraints and with ceramic's marginal and amateur positionings. In a way, Voulkos sought to elevate ceramics to a higher *art* form whereas Arneson, while claiming to treat ceramics as an art,<sup>59</sup> productively mucked around in the basement mud pit of the ceramics world. As the quote at the beginning of this section illustrates, Arneson, throughout his entire career, was aware of and engaged with craft, but under Arneson, UCD did not officially teach pottery or "craft work."<sup>60</sup> Also of note, until he built his own studio in Benicia, CA in 1975, Arneson worked in TB-9, a wartime Quonset, alongside the students, giving them direct access to his processes.<sup>61</sup>

Arneson's approach to ceramics and UCD in general were a good fit for Cicansky: it meant a dramatic break from the pottery-centric program run by Sures at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus. UCD's agricultural foundation connected to Cicansky's interest in horticulture, and a number of the UCD artists in the late 1960s were heavily invested in a funk-inspired approach to art making. For example, Peter Selz's 1967 exhibition *Funk*, where he described Funk as an irreverent attitude, included the work of David Gilhooly, DeForest, William T. Wiley, and Arneson who were all at Davis in the late 1960s when Cicansky was studying there.<sup>62</sup> Funk irreverently questioned and rejected notions of fine or high art and encompassed a variety of media. It was influenced by Dada, Surrealism, and Pop art.<sup>63</sup> Scott A. Shields describes California Funk coming out of Davis as humorous, scatological, sexual, self-conscious, critical, representational, witty, irreverent and kitschy, and its in-your-face amateurish "playfulness masked an underlying concern for more serious issues."<sup>64</sup> Of note with the ceramic work in particular is the use of juxtaposition, anecdote, and humour to arouse a visceral response from the viewer, while embracing the tactile mud-like, amateur, and hobbyist qualities of clay. For example, Arneson was represented in Selz's *Funk* exhibition by four works including *Call Me Lover*, 1965.<sup>65</sup> Typical of the funk aesthetic, *Call Me Lover* appears amateur and sloppy in its construction, humorously juxtaposes the

function (nonfunction) of the telephone with the phrase “call me lover,” and prominently includes sexual references such as a vagina in the middle of the dial and a phallic-like shape for the handset. In addition to the funky influences, Cicansky recalled that an emphasis was placed on working from one’s own experience.



**Figure 13** Victor Cicansky, *Pants, Hats, Neckties*, 1969. Earthenware, glaze, life size. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Upon his arrival in California, Cicansky set to work. All graduate students at UCD were on probation in the first quarter and were expected to produce an exhibition of work to secure their position in the graduate MFA program. Cicansky decided to create a wardrobe of pants, shirts, ball caps, and neck ties (fig. 13). It is important to note his interest in textiles and how they are made actually began with bags in Regina in 1968 when he decided to remake, out of clay, a leather bag his wife had thrown out (fig. 14). However, earlier iterations of a bag form were included in his 1967 exhibition at the Regina Public Library. Having recently attended a sculpture workshop in Regina by Ricardo Gómez on the addition of fibreglass into clay bodies, Cicansky wanted to experiment with this process to see how it might create a more textile-like quality to the material. Remaking the leather bag out of clay was the perfect project to continue his experimentations so he took apart the discarded bag, used the worn leather pieces of bag as pattern templates, cut the patterns out of slabs of clay, and joined them together in the same way the bag was originally constructed. In terms of process, this approach is significant, and I will return to it shortly. Cicansky then rubbed the surface of his clay bag

with oxides just as he had done with the Expo 67 lidded vessels. At first glance, this bag might seem like it is just about recreating a bag in ceramic that looks like the “real thing.” Adamson explains that *facture* is best described by Bauhaus painter and photographer László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) as “the way in which something has been produced shows itself in the finished product. The way it shows itself is what we call *facture*.”<sup>66</sup> Upon closer inspection, Cicansky’s bag is more about an exploration of *facture* (visible modes of making) than it is about *trompe l’oeil* (fooling the eye).



**Figure 14** Victor Cicansky, *Satchel*, 1968. Stoneware, leather, 27.5 x 29.3 x 17.8 cm. Collection: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 1998-35. Source: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.



**Figure 15** Marilyn Levine, *Brown Bag with Zipper*, 1972. Ceramic with nylon fibre, lustre, 20.5 x 30.5 x 21 cm. Collection: Canada Council Art Bank, 72/3-2216. Photo: Maciek Linowski, Synthescape Inc. Reproduced by permission of the artist’s estate and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

To illustrate just how much Cicansky’s bags don’t actually look like real bags, compare *Satchel* (fig. 14) to an example of the *trompe l’oeil* work (fig. 15) of Marilyn Levine (1935–2005), another Regina Clay ceramist with close ties to California. Levine



did not start making bags until after attending a workshop at the Hone-James Studio in Regina in February of 1969 given by James Melchert, another California ceramist and Voulkos student.<sup>67</sup> When placed beside Levine’s bag, it is obvious that Cicansky’s satchel is not *trompe l’oeil*; it momentarily confuses, but it does not trick the eye. The leather-looking parts to Cicansky’s satchel are too thick and appear posed into shape rather than haphazardly slumped as a bag does when it is set down. When examined closely, the texture of the leather isn’t quite right either; it reads as rough and gritty rather than smooth and soft like leather or suede. Levine’s bag does trick the eye: every wrinkle and nuance in the smooth, yet supple, surface of her bag has been meticulously rendered. Unlike the thickness of Cicansky’s leather pieces, Levine’s appear just right and even bend in the same manner as “the real thing.” In fact, Levine’s bag pushes the level of deception to the point where Adamson has argued her objects are about technique alone as they assert the primacy of the visual.<sup>68</sup>



**Figure 16** Marc Courtemanche, *Mortise and Tenon*, 2003. Stoneware, leather, wood dowels, metal tacks, 97 x 48.5 x 47 cm. Collection: MacKenzie Art Gallery, gift of the artist, 2009-022. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

Therefore, ruling out Cicansky’s work being about tricking the eye, consider how it engages with facture or visible modes of making and what that might mean. In her essay “Remediating Craft,” ceramist, theorist, and educator Amy Gogarty examines the ceramic sculptures of University of Regina MFA graduate Marc Courtemanche, who applies woodworking techniques while making his realistic-looking ceramic, wooden chairs (fig. 16) and tools.<sup>69</sup> From preserving the woven patterns of baskets to Roman

sigillata made to look like expensive metal repoussé, Gogarty explains clay has a long history of “remediating” other materials and objects.<sup>70</sup> She uses Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s definition of remediation: “the representation of one medium in another.”<sup>71</sup> Significantly in the case of Courtemanche and Cicansky, it is not just the medium but the processes that are reproduced: for Courtemanche it is woodworking and for Cicansky it is tailoring. Gogarty calls this “remediation of content”: “Courtemanche’s chairs borrow the ‘content’ of wooden chairs, scrupulously reproducing not only the visual appearance of the original chair, but also, as closely as possible, the mode of production.”<sup>72</sup> Cicansky borrows the “content” of objects such as *Satchel* by reproducing not only the visual appearance but the mode of production. Gogarty also notes that content can include the metaphorical meanings associated with material, process, and the object itself; styles and materials can designate class and social standing as seen in, for example, wooden rocking chairs that denote a pioneering spirit or homey nostalgia.<sup>73</sup>



**Figure 17** Victor Cicansky, *VC Ball Cap*, 1969. Earthenware with fibreglass, commercial glaze, 7.5 x 17.8 x 2.6 cm. Collection: Don Thauberger. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.



**Figure 18** Victor Cicansky, *VC Ball Cap (verso)*. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

Before moving on to Cicansky's chairs, an examination of one of the textile pieces made in his first quarter at UCD helps to illustrate the point about borrowing content in terms of the mode of production. The blue, gold, and green "VC" baseball cap (fig. 17) resembles a well-loved and worn cap with eyelets and visible stitching lines. It even uses two of UCD's official colours—blue and gold. However, when the cap is turned over and examined from underneath (fig. 18), the manner in which it was made is clearly visible, and this is *facture*. *Facture* is present in the hat because one can see how the ceramic hat was made and by extension how cloth ball caps are made. The cap of the hat is fashioned out of six triangular slabs of clay pinched together, just as numerous triangular cloth panels are sewn together to form the cap of a hat. Making this hat out of clay could be accomplished with a lot less work and risk of cracking by simply draping one large slab of clay over a spherical form and incising the piecework lines into the top surface of the clay hat with a tool—but again, Cicansky's objects are not about making something that looks like something else—they are about exploring modes of making through material remediation, which consequently heightens material, material agency, process, and metaphor all at once. This *facture*-driven engagement with materials represents a dramatic shift in Cicansky's work that moves away from a Voulkos-inspired antagonism found in his earlier work to an engagement that still breaks or puts pressure on rules or constraints but does so in a funky way that is rooted in personal, lived experience.

Although the VC baseball cap is ceramic, the presence of *facture* means it also engages with textiles. It is through *facture* Cicansky taps into the metaphorically rich vein of textiles and in particular to memory. Memory is important to Cicansky as he often uses a quote he attributes to Romanian sculptor Constantin Brâncuși (1876–1957): “no artist can confine himself to a dead world; memory and habits of daily life cannot be cancelled at will.”<sup>74</sup> As textile theorist and professor Jessica Hemmings notes the significance of memory to cloth in *The Textile Reader*: “Textiles remember. This is not something that we necessarily ask of them, nor is it something we can divert them from doing. They do it regardless... Textiles remember, in part, because they are hostage to their own fragility. Unlike that of metal or stone, the life span of the textile is not dissimilar to that of our own bodies: newness gradually replaced by wear and tear until worn out.”<sup>75</sup> English

Professor Peter Stallybrass eloquently argues in his text “Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning, and the Life of Things,” that “The particular power of cloth...is closely associated with two almost contradictory aspects of its materiality; its ability to be permeated and transformed by maker and wearer alike; its ability to endure over time. Cloth thus tends to be powerfully associated with memory. Or, to put it more strongly, cloth *is* a kind of memory.”<sup>76</sup> Therefore, considering Cicansky’s interest in memory, it is not surprising to see him turn to the subject of cloth, textiles, and fabric in his work.

I see a connection between clay and cloth through memory. Like cloth, clay also has a memory and *is* a kind of memory. For instance, potters throwing and then attaching teapot spouts must account for the clay’s plastic memory as the spout will “unwind” during the drying and firing processes. Potters must also tend to bowls and platters while drying as these shapes have a habit of slightly closing back up to their original cylindrical shape unless tended to. Wet clay also retains, unless smoothed away, impressions of all sorts—finger prints, paddle marks, tooling spirals, and even canvas patterns from the textile that often covers the surfaces of tables in ceramics studios. Once fired, just like cloth, functional ceramic objects such as teacups and plates are marked by use, staining, wear, and damage.

Paul Mathieu extends the concept of memory to the archive and archiving, connecting functional ceramic objects to the subject (but not to cloth) in his essay “The Brown Pot and the White Cube”:

they act as archives—of time, of knowledge and of experiences. Ceramic objects are instant fossils; of all man-made archives, ceramics is still the most efficient. It is cheap, non-recyclable, and, even in its fragility as a shard or fragment, it retains its archival potential to communicate important cultural information. Thus, one of the main cultural functions of ceramics and pottery is to act as an archive.<sup>77</sup>

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines a fossil as “a remnant, impression, or trace of an organism of past geologic ages that has become preserved in the earth’s crust.”<sup>78</sup> Clay is of the earth, and once it is fired, it becomes preserved as ceramic. Through the firing process, all of the traces of various engagements—finger prints, canvas impressions or throwing lines—are fossilized. Building upon this ceramic metaphor, keep in mind ceramics can also archive memory, in fact can fossilize it. Film studies professor Laura U. Marks explains how certain images can act as fossilized memories, and this can also

be applied to ceramic fossils: “When an image is all that remains of a memory, when it cannot be ‘assigned a present’ by an act of remembering but simply stares up at one from where it has been unearthed, then that image is a fossil of what has been forgotten.”<sup>79</sup> By making ceramic garments that have obviously been worn, Cicansky is doubling down, metaphorically speaking, on memory. Given the important discussions in craft theory on memory, the objects must be read as very much a part of the discourse surrounding craft.<sup>80</sup>



**Figure 19** Victor Cicansky, *Big Chair*, c. 1969. Wood, earthenware, glaze, nails, textile fringe, 81.3 x 86.4 x 78.7 cm. Collection: Fine Arts Collection, Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art, University of California, Davis, CA. Anonymous Donor. 1982.208.20S. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

Cicansky created *Big Chair*, 1969 (fig. 19), a near life-size ceramic armchair at UCD, where he continued to explore fossilized memory, facture, and craft. The work not only connects to textiles and memory, but the chair itself is a memory object as it relates to his upbringing in Regina and to his studio at UCD, folding past memories and current realities over each other in one piece. Curator Ethan W. Lasser explains that memory objects, such as jewelry boxes or chairs, are objects made of lasting materials which contain a secure interior space and connect to a particular person.<sup>81</sup> While making this piece, Cicansky sat in the chair when the clay was soft so that it moulded to his body

(think facture here), just as a favourite chair's textile components mould to a sitter's body and just as a favourite pair of jeans wear in patterns related to the wearer's body.

Historian Kitty Hauser describes this form of textile memory as a manifestation of an “uncanny after-image of an absent wearer.”<sup>82</sup> This uncanny after-image is made extra-potent by the archival nature of the ceramic process as it fossilizes Cicansky's past presence in the overstuffed, ceramic chair. This chair and his later armchair series (fig. 20) also relate directly to very specific memories:

One of the most powerful garden images I recall is that of my grandmother in her garden in the spring bending down to pick up a handful of soil. She squeezed it, smelled it and rubbed it between her fingers before returning it back to the garden... There was something magical about what she was doing... Another image from that time was that of a large cabbage sitting on an outdoor chair next to an outdoor table with the fixings for a pot of soup. There was something humorous about this and I remarked, and we both laughed. Much later in life, in California, sitting in an overstuffed chair in my studio, the image came back to me and generated the armchair garden series like armchair cabbage.<sup>83</sup>

The overstuffed, life-sized ceramic chair was subsequently installed for a summer in Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco, CA. Cicansky recalls appreciating just how much the chair, as public sculpture now, was being actively enjoyed by tourists as they made their own memories with it by sitting in the chair and having their photographs taken.<sup>84</sup>



**Figure 20** Victor Cicansky, *Armchair Cabbage 7*, 2002. Ceramic, 16.5 x 19.7 x 19.7 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

In addition to concepts of memory and fossilization, Cicansky's neatly hung clothing, piles of folded shirts, and strewn mounds of worn clothes, all made of clay, speak to current craft theory surrounding the logic of textiles as an alternative way to understand the world through the metaphor of the fold. The fold can facilitate the creation

of a conceptual space or mental landscape.<sup>85</sup> The act of folding enables one to enter this space, and this is why Cicansky's use of textiles and clay conceptually make sense. Yve Lomax writes in "Folds in the Photograph," that to "surprise" or undermine the logic of the binary, the binary must be made to fold in upon itself so that the excluded middle becomes involved within the mental landscape.<sup>86</sup> To simplify this idea, if you take black and white paints and literally fold them in upon themselves, you create grey, the excluded middle. Grey is the result of the act of folding, and to fold is to enter a particular mental landscape which unsettles binary thinking. Lomax, who references Michel Serres, employs "baker's logic" to explain a folded, mental landscape. The baker involutes, which means to curl spirally, as she stretches and folds, stretches and folds during the act of kneading the dough.<sup>87</sup> Cicansky, like most ceramists, also involutes when he wedges clay in order to remove air bubbles and create a homogeneous mass. By way of process, Cicansky from the very beginning of the ceramic textile pieces, enters the conceptual landscape of the fold. First, he wedges the clay, and then he folds the slabs of clay into various textile piles or masses. Once the clay object is dry, it is fired, fossilizing these acts of folding.

Textile theorist and curator Pennina Barnett also draws on philosopher Michel Serres who writes in *Rome: The First Book of Foundations*:

Rigid little boxes fit inside a big one, but the reverse isn't true. It is impossible to put the big one...in any of the smaller ones...Now if there is a logic of boxes, perhaps there is a logic of sacks. A canvas or jute sack...is supple enough to be folded up in a sack with all the other folded sacks, even its former container. I believe that there is a box-thought, the thought we call rigorous, like rigid, inflexible boxes, and sack-thought, like systems of fabric.<sup>88</sup>

Barnett uses Serres' box- and sack-thought metaphors to propose in her essay "folds, fragments, surfaces: towards a poetics of cloth" a *poetics of cloth* made up "of 'soft logics', [and] modes of thought that twist and turn and stretch and fold."<sup>89</sup> She argues soft logics and the poetics of cloth facilitate encounters beyond the constraints of binaries:

The binary offers two possibilities, 'either/or'; 'soft logics' offer multiple possibilities. They are the realm of the 'and/and', where anything can happen. Binaries exclude; 'soft logics' are 'to think without excluding'—yet one is not set against the other, (that would miss the point). And if 'soft' suggests elastic surface, a tensile quality that yields to pressure, this is not a weakness; for 'an

object that *gives in* is actually stronger than one that resists, because it also permits the opportunity to be oneself in a new way.<sup>90</sup>

I will examine two specific works, *Pile of Shirts*, 1969 (fig. 21) and *Abandoned Gladstone*, 1969 (fig. 22), in relation to these notions of box- and sack-thought as well as to soft logics and the fossilized fold.



**Figure 21** Victor Cicansky, *Pile of Shirts*, 1969. Earthenware, glaze, stain, 27.5 x 39.5 x 24 cm. Collection: Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary. Gift of David Gilhooly. NG.1980.093.000. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

The *Pile of Shirts*, comprised of numerous ceramic shirts neatly folded and piled into a box-like shape, can be read as a physical representation of box-thought: every idea must be neatly folded up (studied and defined), put into its appropriate box or pile (filled with structures and sanctioned connections), and fit within a binary way of thinking (inside or outside the box); and anything that cannot be neatly folded up and piled into a box-like system of understanding is discredited, destroyed, erased, or forced to fold in such a way that it will fit, which is in itself an act of destruction. Looking at Cicansky's pile of neatly folded shirts does not invite the viewer to unpack and look further as the piece is contained, complete, and fixed/fired. It is next to impossible to look deeper into a metaphorical folded landscape filled with ideas, memories, or concepts associated with this pile of ceramic shirts as the various tops are folded so tightly there is little room to comprehend what is going on with each discrete garment; instead the box form takes precedence.





**Figure 22** Victor Cicansky, *Abandoned Gladstone*, 1969. Earthenware with fibreglass, glaze, felt, metal, 31 x 95 x 58 cm. Collection: Gift of the Artist, Gardiner Museum, Toronto, G99.13.1 a-e. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

With the *Abandoned Gladstone* bag, it is obvious Cicansky folded the clay in order to create the textiles when he wedged the material and when he created the piles, but it also appears as though the clothes are unfolding. Opposite points of view fold and unfold upon each other in this work, activating the excluded middle space of binary logic. Barnett quotes philosopher Gilles Deleuze “to unfold is to increase, to grow; whereas to fold is to diminish, to reduce, ‘to withdraw into the recesses of the world.’”<sup>91</sup> Therefore, *Abandoned Gladstone* is a physical representation of sack-thought where the chaotic clothes are actively spilling out of their container, the sack. Or, are they climbing back in? Is the bag and are the clothes in the process of unfolding or folding? Is the green and yellow striped shirt the last one out of the bag or the first one in? In the *Pile of Shirts*, I know what’s on top, the flower-patterned shirt, but I’m not so sure of order, understanding and boundaries with *Abandoned Gladstone*. Understandings no longer seem to unfold so concretely, just as Cicansky’s pushing of disciplinary boundaries softens the box-logic/definition of ceramics and craft.

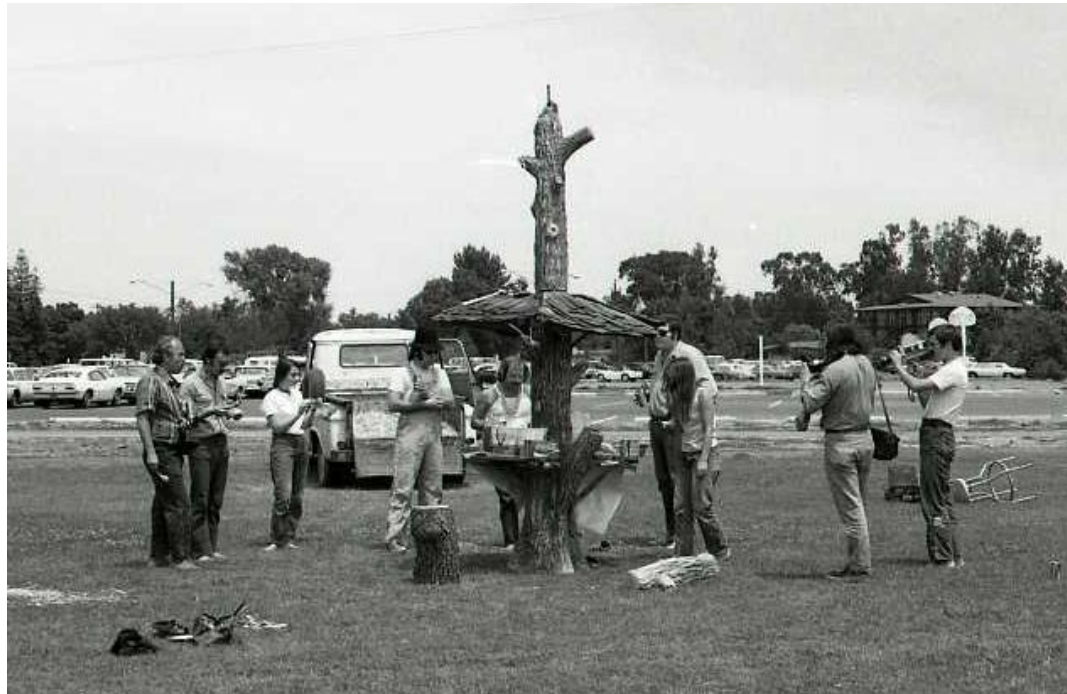
Barnett writes: “Folded in utero, creased in death, and between, shifting in twists and turns: are we subject to similar forces—experiencing sensations more somatic than cerebral, more felt than remembered; sensations that seem to by-pass the brain and act directly with the nervous system?”<sup>92</sup> Folds can be orderly as seen in *Pile of Shirts* or folds can be chaotic and felt as seen in both the bag and strewn pieces of clothing in

*Abandoned Gladstone*. A physical fold in a textile can be a metaphor for the folding and unfolding of events in our lives and the memories associated with them: some events are chaotic and some are orderly. Orderly events fit nicely and neatly into little boxes of memory while chaotic events spill out across our lives. Even though the textiles in *Abandoned Gladstone* are fossilized in place, as in they cannot be manipulated the way an actual textile can, soft logics are at play here as meaning, definitions, and boundaries are malleable to Cicansky.

### **By Way of Allegory: Cicansky as Radioactive Framer**

“Ruins stand as reminders. Memory is always incomplete, always imperfect, always falling into ruin; but the ruins themselves, like other traces, are treasures: our links to what came before, our guide to situating ourselves in a landscape of time. To erase the ruins is to erase the visible public triggers of memory; a city without ruins and traces of age is like a mind without memories.”<sup>93</sup> – Rebecca Solnit

“For a Saskatchewan boy where in some places, not a tree or bush interrupted the horizon as far as the eye could see, the redwood forests and cathedral-like groves, were magnificent. I was enthralled.”<sup>94</sup> – Victor Cicansky



**Figure 23** Victor Cicansky, *The Last Picnic*, 1970. Solano Park, University of California, Davis, CA. Robert Arneson (far left), Victor Cicansky (second from left), Tyrus Gerlach (centre in hat), Lucian Octavius Pompili (in white sleeveless shirt and necklace), David Gilhooly (fourth from right), and all others are unknown. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Along with the large, overstuffed ceramic chair (fig. 19), Cicansky made other ceramic seating during his time at UCD in the form of ceramic stump stools (fig. 24) and *Stump Chair* (fig. 25). One of his final projects was *The Last Picnic* (fig. 23), a life-sized picnic table where he invited colleagues to share in a meal of Kentucky Fried Chicken while gathered around the table, which in turn was surrounded by ceramic stump stools. When asked in 1970 about his subject matter, Cicansky said, “I got working with different things—materials, forms, moulds—in my studio. This got me going and broke the flow of the clothes series. A lot of ideas came: the chairs, shoes, door mats, apartments, and the tree works...In both [the clothes and tree works] there are a few things that have interested me—scale and detail. In some ways the tree works become monumental.”<sup>95</sup> Moving forward, scale, detail, and monumentality become increasingly important in his work.



**Figure 24** Victor Cicansky, *Stump*, 1970. Earthenware, 41.5 x 30 x 30 cm. Collection: MacKenzie Art Gallery, University of Regina Collection, gift of Veronica and David Thauberger, 1988-2. Source: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.



**Figure 25** Victor Cicansky, *Stump Chair*, 1970. Ceramic, measurements unavailable. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



**Figure 26** Orthodox Holy Trinity St. Nicholas Chapel, Fort Ross, Sonoma County, CA. Photo by Frank Schulenburg, 2016. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Russian\\_chapel\\_at\\_Fort\\_Ross\\_\(2016\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_chapel_at_Fort_Ross_(2016).jpg).



**Figure 27** Photo taken in Romania during Cicansky's 1980 travels to the country. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

*The Last Picnic* and other sculptures depicting various states of decay were inspired by ruins, dilapidated buildings, and the junk piles Cicansky had seen while travelling in the Russian River Valley and surrounding areas of California. For example, located just off the No. 1 Coast Highway and north of the Russian River Valley is the 1812 Russian American Company's settlement known as Fort Ross.<sup>96</sup> The Fort Ross Chapel was originally built in the mid 1820s and is the first Russian Orthodox structure outside of Alaska in North America.<sup>97</sup> Its use of wooden boards and the rounded, peaked rooves of the belfry and accompanying tower (fig. 26) are echoed in *The Last Picnic*. Romania's wood culture was, and continues to be, a strong influence on Cicansky, and at the time of *The Last Picnic*, he had already travelled to Romania in 1965. Consider this striking large wooden structure Cicansky photographed while traveling in Romania in 1980 (fig. 27) and its resemblance to the design and wood aesthetic of *The Last Picnic*. It

can be assumed he had seen the same sorts of wooden structures when travelling there in 1965. Like the overstuffed ceramic chair, Cicansky memorializes memories of the past as well as his present reality, although this time there was a shift from textile to wood, from *Satchel* to *Stump Chair*, and from a memory of his grandmother in the garden—as seen in the overstuffed armchairs—to a deeper cultural memory of Romania mixed in with his current experiences of the ruins of California as seen in *The Last Picnic* and various other ruin-themed pieces.



**Figure 28** Victor Cicansky, *The Last Picnic* and *Stump Chair* on display as part of the group shows Ceramics by David Gillhooly *A Gentleman Baboon's View of Frog World*; Chris Unterseher *Self Portraits*; and Victor Cicansky *One, Two, Tree*, Hansen-Fuller Gallery, San Francisco, CA (June 30–July 31). Reproduced by permission of the artist.

An iteration of *The Last Picnic* (fig. 28) was included in Cicansky's exhibition titled *One, Two, Tree*, displayed at the Hansen-Fuller Gallery in San Francisco in 1970 along with simultaneous exhibitions by David Gilhooly and Chris Unterseher. Accompanying the table, stumps, and chairs was a ceramic fountain titled *Memories of California*, c. 1970 (fig. 29), now lost, perhaps in ruin somewhere in California. The fountain consisted of a ceramic wooden stump for a base and a basin which was an

inverted version of the peaked roof seen in *The Last Picnic*. Inside the basin, there was a miniature ruin: a broken-down brick garden wall and a remnant of an interior pink wall with an arched doorway. During the opening reception, the basin was filled with cheap wine, and guests were invited to fill a glass from the spigot found on the trunk.<sup>98</sup>



**Figure 29** Victor Cicansky, *Memories of California*, c. 1970. Ceramic, 177 x 94 x 94 cm. Also exhibited at the Hansen-Fuller Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

*Memories of California* is an early example of Cicansky's exploration of the conceptual potential of the ruin. As stated in the above quote by writer Rebecca Solnit, ruins are the visible public triggers of memory. They "memorialize the fleeting nature of all things and the limited powers of humankind...[and to erase a ruin] is to erase the understanding of the unfolding relation between all things."<sup>99</sup> She argues everything is a ruin of what came before it, a process that in Cicansky's work can be illustrated in the base of *Memories of California*, which appears to be made from the ruin of a tree but is in fact ceramic.

*Stump Chair* (fig. 25) also appears to be made from the ruins of a tree. Chairs are conceptually rich objects as they are a merger between art, craft, and design.<sup>100</sup> In terms

of design, Cicansky's early foray into chairs, and especially *Stump Chair*, make visible the relationship between material, knowledge, and time, as outlined in Judy Attfield's book *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life*: "Things like chairs are not natural in the organic sense, they do not grow on trees; they are the result of design, human thought, manufacture and distribution processes based on detailed and strategic calculations. They are also the accumulation of hundreds if not thousands of years of experience and skill in how things are made and put together from different materials."<sup>101</sup> Chairs can represent power, stake out territory, or predetermine physical proximity within social settings. Anne Massey asserts in her book *Chair* that "[n]o other object characterizes the impact of modernity with such clarity."<sup>102</sup> Interestingly, with *Stump Chair*, the chair's function is not the primary design-based decision, as it is definitely not a comfortable nor an easily transportable object. Instead, by making the functionality of the chair secondary,<sup>103</sup> the material, process, and ruin are highlighted.

The back of *Stump Chair* reveals Cicansky's careful rendering of the growth rings of the ruined tree, now fossilized through the process of firing. These rings are a history of climate and growing conditions, of encounters between tree and external forces; they are a map of the tree's life. They are traces that echo the fossilized encounter of the absent body (also a form of ruin) seen in the life-sized ceramic armchair (fig. 19) discussed in the previous section. The seat of *Stump Chair* shows visible signs of being hand-chiseled into shape rather than cut with a machine, pointing to modes of hand production which are a constant theme in craft. California artist and trained ceramist J. B. Blunk (1926–2002) hand made furniture out of large logs and giant burls. *Invisible Presence*, 1962 reflects his search for "the soul" of wood.<sup>104</sup> This passion for material combined with individualistic expression is a defining feature of handmade furniture from the 1960s, and the unique characteristics of wood made it an ideal material for those makers, like Blunk, who were searching for individualistic expression.<sup>105</sup> Curator Jennifer Dunlop Fletcher suggests the title, *Invisible Presence*, not only refers to an absent yet present sitter but to the presence yet absence of the tree as well.<sup>106</sup> While not literally made of solid wood as Blunk's chair, Cicansky's ceramic *Stump Chair* is tree and chair, ceramic and wood and craft and sculpture. All of these qualities fold binary juxtapositions in upon each other while poetically speaking to the invisible absent-

presence of maker, sitter, and tree. Had Cicansky's chair been made of wood alone, like Blunk's work, the abstract potential of the fold and its undermining of the binary could not happen in the same way. Unlike the textile pieces where Cicansky as tailor was thinking through the conceptual potential of facture, fabric, and the fold, the chairs signal another shift from tailor to framer, a craftsman who assembled wooden chair parts in specific areas of England up until the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moving forward for the purposes of this paper, "framer" will refer to someone who, like the historic chair framer, assembles parts into a whole. In the case of the chair framer, wood and its species-specific properties also play an important role during the part assembling process, and subsequently, material-specific knowledge is an important part of the craft of chair building just as it is to Cicansky's practice as a whole and especially to his explorations of wood.



**Figure 30** Victor Cicansky, *Robin's Egg Pear Bonsai*, 1998. Bronze, patina, acrylic paint, 71.1 x 45.7 x 43.1 cm. Collection: Peter and Ina Cicansky. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

Like ceramics and textiles, philosopher Jean Baudrillard writes "Wood draws its substance from the earth, it lives and breathes and 'labours'... Time is embedded in its very fibres, which makes it the perfect container, because every content is something we want to rescue from time."<sup>107</sup> In addition to its material connection to time, wood is also culturally significant. Curator Lowery Stokes Sims astutely points out how wood has and continues to punctuate North American national identity: George Washington admitting to chopping down his father's favourite cherry tree (honesty and truth), the building of



log cabins (shelter and homespun), the planting of trees (colonial transformation of the prairies and conservation of forested areas), and lumberjack folk culture (hard work and overcoming adversity).<sup>108</sup> It has also played a crucial role in the history of humankind as a source of fuel, building material, and a powerful symbol of growth and rebirth.<sup>109</sup> Note how historian John Perlin's quote about wood from his book *A Forest Journey: The Role of Wood in the Development of Civilization* touches on themes and symbols seen throughout Cicansky's career in the form of wood paired with stones (fig. 30), bones (fig. 31) and industrially made shovels (fig. 32): "Wood, in fact, is the unsung hero of the technological revolution that has brought us from a stone and bone culture to our present age."<sup>110</sup>



**Figure 31** Victor Cicansky, *Prairie Bone Plant*, 2003. Ceramic, 17.75 x 25.5 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



**Figure 32** Victor Cicansky, *Landscaping the Mind*, 1999. Wood, acrylic paint, 218.44 x 62.23 x 38.1 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



**Figure 33** Victor Cicansky, *This is the fountain you've been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites*, 1974. Earthenware, glaze, commercial decals, submersible pump, pipe, 142 x 74 x 71 cm. Collection: Canada Council Art Bank / Banque d'art du Conseil des arts du Canada, 74/5-0447. Photo: Brandon Clarida Image Services. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the Canada Council Art Bank.



**Figure 34** Victor Cicansky, *This is the fountain you've been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites*, 1974. Earthenware, glaze, commercial decals, submersible pump, pipe, 142 x 74 x 71 cm. Collection: Canada Council Art Bank / Banque d'art du Conseil des arts du Canada, 74/5-0447. Photo: Brandon Clarida Image Services. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the Canada Council Art Bank.



**Figure 35** Victor Cicansky, *This is the fountain you've been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites*, 1974. Earthenware, glaze, commercial decals, submersible pump, pipe, 142 x 74 x 71 cm. Collection: Canada Council Art Bank / Banque d'art du Conseil des arts du Canada, 74/5-0447. Photo: Brandon Clarida Image Services. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the Canada Council Art Bank.



**Figure 36** Victor Cicansky, *This is the fountain you've been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites* (detail). Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Although *Memories of California* is lost, another fountain, *This is the fountain you've been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites*, 1974 (figs. 33–36) was made after Cicansky's return to Saskatchewan and is replete with the detailed ruins of a number of the series he was working on at the time: chairs, VW buses, and ramshackle structures. These ruins are all miniaturized versions of larger things. Although at the tail end of his time at Davis, Cicansky worked on a monumental scale, he also worked on a miniature scale. Just before his arrival at UCD, Arneson and some fellow ceramists had acquired a number of old Duncan molds, and they used them to create miniature assemblages such as *WHATEVER I ATTEMPT IT IS USUALLY DONE WITH THE FULL FORCE OF MY...*, 1970.<sup>111</sup> Arneson recalls: "We all sat around slip casting... We would just pour a mold, take them out. It would be like making a lot of junk and then assembling them at random. Whatever would go together, just working without thinking."<sup>112</sup> *Untitled (Saskatchewan License Plate Series)*, c. 1970 (fig. 37) is indicative of the influential nature of TB-9 (the ceramics studio at Davis) and Arneson on Cicansky. Both pieces are small porcelain vignettes, appear to be assembled at random, and evoke a sense of ruin. In addition, the act of stamping the title on the rim of the vessel of the Arneson example is echoed on the rim of *This is the fountain you've been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites*. However, unlike Arneson's small vignettes where slip cast, hobby craft objects are assembled together in an improvisational way, Cicansky's *Untitled (Saskatchewan License Plate Series)* miniaturizes his own larger ceramic sculptures such as *Memories of California*, which themselves contain miniatures.



**Figure 37** Victor Cicansky, *Untitled (Saskatchewan License Plate Series)*, 1970. Porcelain, 21.6 x 39.4 x 40.6 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

As previously noted, in 1970, scale and detail were becoming increasingly important to Cicansky's thinking, and miniaturization in particular relates to time and craft. Curator Anthony Kiendl argues scale is crucial to the modernist as good art is big, objective, and powerful; consequently, miniatures can be understood as anti-authoritarian because they refute the solemnity, permanence, and immortality of monumentality.<sup>113</sup> By miniaturizing his tree monuments, Cicansky shifts the position of the viewer from minute to gigantic; the artist is no longer the giant making the art—the viewer now has a giant-like, transcendent view over the artist's creation.

This trend towards miniaturization is also seen in the sculptural work of a number of other contemporaneous Saskatchewan ceramists including Joe Fafard, David Thauberger, and Lorne Beug and was the impetus for the 2005 MacKenzie Art Gallery exhibition *Regina Clay: Worlds in the Making*. Curator Timothy Long notes, "I was struck once again by the artist's formal inventiveness, especially their play with material and scale. Having recently seen Anthony Kiendl's brilliant exhibition *Little Worlds* at the Dunlop Art Gallery, it occurred to me that the Regina ceramists, like the artists in Anthony's show, were engaged in the creation of worlds, small in scale, but big in scope."<sup>114</sup> Considering modernism's connection to the monumental, it makes sense a group of artists who wanted to craft their own place within the Regina art scene would embrace the miniature and a material like clay.

As Long noted above, a miniature is filled with an abundance of detail; in fact, the reduction of scale enables an expansion of content to the point where an entire world can be represented.<sup>115</sup> According to poet and literary critic Susan Stewart, qualities of the miniature include a distant "overseeing" viewer (a giant of sorts)<sup>116</sup> with a simultaneous and transcendent view of the entire miniature.<sup>117</sup> Thus, when attending to the miniature world, a perceived slowing down of time takes place.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, to fossilize time by way of ceramics in terms of wood or textiles is one step, but to miniaturize those fossilized materials brings object agency back into the mix as now one even perceives time differently when engaging with a miniaturized piece of, say ceramic wood. Scale in relation to the viewer is an important contributing factor to object agency. In addition, as craft is related to labour, the miniature requires that the model-maker make everything by hand, even industrially produced objects where human labour is no longer at play—such

as the VW bus or plumbing pipes.<sup>119</sup> This also relates to agency as the miniature demands special parts and attention from its maker. As previously discussed in terms of facture, underlying all of Cicansky's work is a deep respect and understanding of labour, which he credits to his father, Frank Cicansky (1900–1982) and his Grandmother, Elena Gafencu (1880–1984). Of his father Cicansky recalls: “When I told my parents that I wanted to quit school my father gave me a hammer, a lunch pail and arranged for a job with a construction company. I had worked with him in his shop for years and helped him build houses.”<sup>120</sup> Therefore, object agency and Cicansky's deep respect for labour and craft are brought together through the miniature.

*This is the fountain you've been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites* contains an abundance of miniatures, symbols, and potential narratives. This abundance developed within Cicansky's work upon his return to Regina as *Memories of California* (fig. 29), the large fountain with a single ruin he made while at Davis, is much simpler in design. Allegory can be understood as a continuous narrative metaphor that is open-ended with multiple, sometimes hidden messages, images, or emblems of a moral or political nature; whereas a symbol is unified and transcendent.<sup>121</sup> A symbol represents or stands in for something else: for example, in Cicansky's case, the ceramic chairs with vegetables “seated” on them stand in for his grandmother and the labour associated with growing one's own food. Adamson explains: “If a symbolic form possesses immediacy and can be considered complete once it is realized, an allegorical text is durational. It unfolds over time, potentially without end. As it does so, it continually draws attention to the procedures that give it form [think skilled work and facture here]... An allegorical text is a microcosm, which captures a larger reality (macrocosm) in a condensed, emblematic manner.”<sup>122</sup> Allegory and symbol should not be understood as binary opposites but rather as a continuum where an abundance of symbols can lead to allegory; this allegorical abundance blossomed in Cicansky's work throughout the 1970s.

Cicansky's earlier bags, piles of shirts, and even *The Last Picnic* and *Stump Chair* can be understood symbolically: they represent or stand in for knowledge, time, ways of thinking, specific memories, specific people, and labour. There is limited narrative potential within these pieces. *This is the fountain you've been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites* layers and combines these very symbols in miniature form,

creating narrative meaning which unfolds over time while simultaneously impacting the viewer's sense of time. In terms of familiar symbols, the chair makes an appearance once again, but this time it is a miniaturized version of the large, overstuffed ceramic armchair he made while at Davis which symbolized his grandmother, her garden-related labour, and the artist himself. Wood appears as stump, log, and board: a large, monumental stump forms the base of the fountain, miniature logs make up the foundation of the ramshackle structure, and boards form the basin of the fountain as well as the walls of the ruined building. To Cicansky, wood symbolizes nature, time, strength, and different types of labour depending on the form of wood. As Perlin states in his book on the role of wood in the development of civilization, wood is a foundational material and can be seen as such in *This is the fountain you've been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites*: it is present as the supporting base of the fountain and the miniature log wall next to the rock foundation under the ruined structure.

Rocks are symbolically significant to Cicansky as well. He states:

In megalithic cultures rocks were considered sacred and were used to build sanctuaries and temples. Stones were not dead. They were living creatures with the power to bewitch us with their eternal beauty and permanence. They had symbolic value. They were considered to hold concentrations of power and life. People believed that touching a sacred stone generated fertility. Today, who can help but be awestruck by these majestic stones. They are evidence of nature's inexhaustible creative powers.<sup>123</sup>

During a conversation with the artist, Cicansky also shared how he associates rocks with warmth as warmed rocks were put into his pocket as a child to keep his hands warm in the winter, and he had heard stories of how piles of warmed rocks were used as a form of heating in early prairie homes.<sup>124</sup> In summary, rocks have a variety of symbolic meanings for Cicansky including deep geological time, the feeling of warmth in cold months, life, and nature's creative power. Ceramic trompe-l'oeil rocks—it is important to note the amount of time and care Cicansky puts in to creating ceramic rocks that fool the eye—make up the foundation of the ruined house in *This is the fountain you've been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites* and are found within the basin as well. As a framer, Cicansky combines multiple forms of fossilized wood and rocks in order to form the foundations of the house and fountain: time and nature's creative power serve as foundational material here.

Fountains themselves have symbolic meaning as they can stand in for the waters of eternal life, purification, or rejuvenation.<sup>125</sup> As an important part of landscape architecture and aqueducts, they have been around since ancient times and were often considered sacred with shrines built around them.<sup>126</sup> Art historians Maria Ann Conelli and Marilyn Symmes note in “Fountains as Propaganda,” that

many European and American fountains serve as potent instruments of propaganda. Over the centuries, the nobility and the papacy as well as governments and corporations have commissioned these works as images of strength, power, prosperity, and glory...Fountains could convey, through symbol or metaphor, political, dynastic or civic propaganda. The combination of water and sculpture became a symbol of power and identity.<sup>127</sup>

Fountains as symbols for power became especially popular during the Renaissance and often used Classical myths as subject matter. Cicansky’s ceramic “fountains,” while more in line with a DIY weekend bird bath project (in fact I grew up with a tree stump bird bath featuring a metal garbage can lid for the basin in my grandfather’s yard), were originally inspired by the enormous fountains he saw while travelling in 1965 throughout Europe.<sup>128</sup> While visiting various sites in Italy, he vividly remembers noting how people gathered around the fountains on hot days to beat the heat and experience the calming effects of water. He also recalls seeing specific fountains dedicated to Venus, which might have included the *Fountain of Venus and Adonis*, 1770–1780 at the Royal Palace of Caserta in Caserta, Italy.<sup>129</sup> Conelli and Symmes argue that the hydraulic system at Caserta is one of the great technical achievements of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and symbolizes the power and wealth of the monarch, Charles VII of Naples.<sup>130</sup> The fountain is a Baroque tour-de-force by Luigi Vanvetelli (1700–1773) with figures sitting on rocky outcrops close to the gurgling pool of water, much like the placement of the figure in Cicansky’s fountain and the trickling and gurgling noises he has drawn attention to within his ceramic water with words such as “trickle” impressed into the ceramic surface (fig. 36).

The nude woman in Cicansky’s fountain, with hands on hips, directly references his memories of people lounging around the European fountains he saw in 1965. However, Cicansky also describes the woman as “Venus,” a symbol for love, female beauty and the pleasures of life, who rose from the sea and has been famously depicted within a large scalloped shell. It is hard not to think of the shell in Sandro Botticelli’s (c.



1445–1510) painting *Birth of Venus*, c. 1485 in relation to the basin of *This is the fountain you've been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites* and its rough edge. Venus' attribute, Cupid, a symbol for uncontrollable desire and pure sensual love, is found perched atop an outcrop on the back of the ramshackle house in Cicansky's fountain (fig. 34).<sup>131</sup> Other artists such as François Boucher (1703–1770), included in his painting *Fountain of Venus*, 1756 (fig. 38) the goddess (painted grey as if made of stone), sitting within a natural-looking fountain setting with cupid beside her and ruins behind the two of them. Cicansky's fountain playfully acknowledges these historical art examples by combining Venus, cupid, and ruins in ceramic rather than stone form.



**Figure 38** François Boucher, *Fountain of Venus*, 1756. Oil on canvas, 246 x 228.5 x 6.5 cm (framed). Collection: The Cleveland Art Museum, The Thomas L. Fawick Memorial Collection 1979.55. Source: Cleveland Art Museum Collection, <http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1979.55>.

Growing up in Saskatchewan during the 1930s, water was particularly important so it is no surprise the theatrical, Baroque fountains of Europe left such an impression on him. Cicansky recalled, as the much-needed rains came and filled the ditches in Regina's east end, how the sound of croaking frogs filled the air. When asked about the presence of a frog in *This is the fountain you've been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites*, Cicansky explained it represents his memory of the relief that came with rain, the subsequent life the rains brought with them, and the auditory environment associated with that relief and blossoming of life.<sup>132</sup> The frog in the fountain is facing

Venus, a symbol of love and beauty (fig. 35). In terms of life on earth, the two work hand in hand; Venus is a symbol of love and fertility as is the frog which is a symbol of a healthy, fertile ecosystem. The layering of all these symbols forms an allegory of love and life on the Prairies. Combined with the symbols of time and life on earth in the form of rocks and wood, an abundance of symbolic meaning is beginning to unfold into an allegory of life.

The classical references in Cicansky's fountain do not end with Venus and cupid. Note the "wallpaper," especially the frieze, placed above the ceramic chair (which symbolizes the absent artist) within the falling down ruin of a room. The chair is positioned so that the sitter may peer out the open door to the basin below. Curator Gill Saunders notes in *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration* that wallpaper is essentially imitative as it originated as a stand-in for tapestries and other textile hangings: "Wallpaper becomes a metaphor for dishonesty and dissembling, for the ephemeral as opposed to the secure and lasting, and for the valuing of appearance over substance."<sup>133</sup> The imitative aspect of wallpaper is something it shares with ceramics. Paul Mathieu notes in "The Simulation Esthetics: Illusion and (L)imitations":

This idea of substituting ceramic materials for other materials (a concept central to the Simulation Esthetics), finds its origin in tomb offerings and funerary rituals, examples of which can be found all over the world since the beginning of ceramic culture...It is interesting to note that before the advent of plastics and other synthetics, ceramics was the best, possibly the only, material who could imitate other materials so readily and successfully. Again this is a characteristic of the material at the physical level and of the art form at the conceptual level that is intrinsic to it and distinguishes it from other materials and other art forms.<sup>134</sup>

While Mathieu's assertions regarding ceramics being the only material that could easily and successfully imitate another are a bit too bold for me, imitation does play an important role in ceramic history and, as already discussed, in Cicansky's work. Wallpaper's roots also lie in the simulacrum (which is also wrapped up in notions of deception and dishonesty), and wallpaper patterns can reflect the function of the room and the gender, age, and class of the people occupying those papered rooms.<sup>135</sup> By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wallpaper was found in all types of houses including tenements and public buildings—it wasn't solely for luxurious spaces.<sup>136</sup> Shortly before the turn of the century, the Aesthetic interiors of the late 1800s and the guidebooks associated with

home decorating advocated for the use of wallpaper and a tripartite division of the wall: dado, filling and frieze.<sup>137</sup> For example, the frontispiece of architect and designer Sir Robert William Edis' (1839–1927) guidebook *Decoration & Furniture of Town Houses*, 1881, depicts his own drawing room with William Morris wallpaper and a dramatic pictorial frieze. He states, “As a rule, however, in the larger rooms of a house, I think it will be found desirable to break the surface of the walls, by means of divisional lines, into dados and friezes, either for useful or decorative purposes, or both.”<sup>138</sup> Aesthetic friezes were often geometric or pictorial in nature and found at the top of the wall as seen in the panel of *La Margarete*, 1876–c. 1900 (made) (fig. 39) wallpaper and wallpaper frieze by Walter R. W. S. Crane (1845–1915). Curiously, the organization of Cicansky's walls are mixed up with the frieze above the chair rail and the filling above the frieze—a point I will unpack shortly. The frieze is classical with women in procession holding sheaves of wheat, grapes and baskets of fruit. When asked if the commercial decal was a reproduction of a particular Roman frieze, Cicansky said he did not think it was but he found the commercial decal at a hobby shop.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, the procession appears to be related to the harvest or to the variety of celebrations surrounding Bacchus, the god of wine, who is also associated with fertility.<sup>140</sup>



**Figure 39** Walter R.W.S. Crane (designer), Jeffrey & Co. (producers), *La Margarete*, 1876–c. 1900 (made). Colour prints from wood blocks on paper. Collection: Victoria and Albert Museum, Given by the Wallpaper Manufacturers Ltd. E.1837-1934. Source: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

*This is the fountain you've been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites* contains an abundance of symbols. Let's recap Cicansky's various acts of framing these symbols. The fountain form relates to and symbolizes strength, power, rejuvenation, and life, and with a fountain comes water. Water is present in ceramic form and is alluded to through the presence of words impressed into the ceramic "water" surface such as "trickle." Auditorily, the presence of the frog also signals the presence of water and the blossoming of life that comes with it. Wood and rocks are foundational materials in this ceramic sculpture as they serve as foundations for the various structures: fountain and ramshackle structure. These foundational materials symbolize nature, time in its most ancient sense, power, strength, and life. The classical symbols also relate to life and to love, desire, and beauty. Therefore, it is not out-of-the-question to read this fountain as an allegory for life on earth, from a natural and agricultural perspective—from forest to harvest. This object might very well be *the fountain you've been looking for all your life*; while drinking its waters might not restore one's youth, it does contain the foundational materials for life on earth, both past and present.

But what about the *mosquito bites*, ruined structure, and partially submerged crashed vehicle? Are these parts one thinks of when thinking of a fountain related to life? Might the allegory here be framed with a critical edge? The domestic setting—and it can be read as such because of the division of the wall and overstuffed armchair—is filled with symbols and images relating to absence and identity (the overstuffed armchair), dishonesty (wallpaper and the mixed-up order of the division of the walls), and ruin. This is not a stable and idyllic "home sweet home" but one with an oscillating, distorted sense of time achieved through the ceramic fountain's agency in the form of miniaturized objects—like the overstuffed armchair—that are often connected to specific people and memories.

The overstuffed armchair—a stand-in for the artist—looks out a destroyed doorway at a semi-submerged vehicle which is a key object within the fountain as it relates directly to the decade in which the fountain was made and to Cicansky's developing politics. The VW bus was popular with the counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s because it was cheap to maintain and was in direct contrast to the muscle cars and bold-grilled luxury sedans of the time: "It was anti-style, anti-success,

and rebellious in a totally new way.”<sup>141</sup> Due to their design and horsepower, the buses were and still are notoriously slow and treacherous to drive with a tendency to tip over if a corner is taken too fast.<sup>142</sup> As an owner of one of these iconic vehicles which have come to symbolise the counter-culture movement, Cicansky was well aware of its maneuverability shortfalls, but he never crashed one himself.<sup>143</sup> Therefore, unlike the overstuffed armchair which can be understood to be a stand-in for the artist, the crashed VW—while peripherally in its crashed state relates to the icon’s design shortfalls—is a stand-in for the counter culture movement.

The bus’ presence is more than a tongue-in-cheek nod to an iconic piece of design and its failures; keep in mind when this piece was made—1974. Given this, I propose that its presence is more of a critique of counterculture utopianism and the 1970s than of the vehicle itself. Curator Andrew Blauvelt uses the term “hippie modern” to describe a historical moment during the counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s that was bursting with creativity and “bracketed between the Merry Pranksters’ cross-country acid trip in 1964 and the OPEC oil embargo of 1973 to 1974, which brought into dramatic relief the limits of Western society’s progress and geopolitical power.”<sup>144</sup> The utopic impulses of the 1960s hippies involved sweeping away conventions dominated by a modern industrial Eurocentric perspective in favour of spirituality, healing and technology inspired by a variety of non-European cultures including Africa and India.<sup>145</sup> In 1969, Theodore Roszak published *The Making of a Counter Culture* where he argued young people’s social experiments with love, freedom, spirituality, and personal development—the activities of these hippie modernists—were the beginnings of radical change that would “restore man’s feeling of unity with nature and the individual’s communal feeling for his fellows.”<sup>146</sup> Blauvelt argues while the modernist wanted to invent without history, the hippie wanted to recapture, relocate or reboot, and the hippies did so while drawing inspiration from a 19<sup>th</sup> century agrarian way of life and pioneer dress mixed with a Victorian flair: this particular moment in time brought the two paradigms together.<sup>147</sup> He states, “Hippie modernism marks the tension between the modern and its countercultural other, which adopts a more local, timely, emotive and often irreverent, and radical disposition.”<sup>148</sup> In terms of art and other forms of visual culture, the hippie modernist drew upon the theatrical qualities of the participatory events

of Happenings, embraced Fluxus' democratic spirit, and was inspired by Pop Art's use of popular culture.<sup>149</sup> Cicansky, while at UCD, experimented with participatory events with projects such as his *The Last Picnic* (fig. 23), *Memories of California* (fig. 29) and artist Lowell Darling's *Unfired Clay Exhibition '70*, where he exhibited an unfired book made of clay.<sup>150</sup> He was encouraged by his teachers to look locally for inspiration which he mixed with his interest in Pop Art and Surrealism, culminating in his series of shoes, bags, and chairs. With all this said and considering his current political views on environmentalism and food security, Cicansky was and still is very much a hippie modernist.

However, the zeitgeist of the mid 1970s was dramatically different from the beginning of the hippie modernist moment in the 1960s. Architecture and design critic Thomas Hine opens his book *The Great Funk: Styles of the Shaggy, Sexy, Shameless 1970s* in dramatic fashion:

If you wanted a world that was orderly, where progress was guaranteed, the seventies were a terrible time to be alive. Cars were running out of gas. The country [USA] was running out of promise... Only a decade before, as the nation anticipated the conquest of space, the defeat of poverty, an end to racism, and a society where people moved faster and felt better than they ever had before, it seemed that there was nothing America couldn't do. Even the protestors of the sixties objected that America was using its immense wealth and power to do the wrong things, not that it did things wrong. Yet during the seventies it seemed that the United States couldn't do anything right. The country had fallen into the Great Funk.<sup>151</sup>

University of Calgary history professor Nancy Janovick explains in her essay "Rural Countercultures" which focused on the potters of British Columbia that "The economic recession of the early 1970s incited fears of global economic collapse. Back-to-the-landers believed that removing themselves from capitalist economic systems and becoming self-reliant was their only hope of survival."<sup>152</sup> Like those West Coast potters, Victor and his wife, Fran, both took leaves of absences in 1974 from their teaching jobs in order to try living self-sufficiently on their newly purchased piece of property in Craven, Saskatchewan—a 1917 brick school house. The Cicansky's year-long plan to live off the land involved growing the majority of their own food in a large garden and raising pigeons to eat. As curator Timothy Long argues in his essay "Cicansky's Whole Earth Romanian Icon," Cicansky's studies at Davis had profoundly impacted his views

on the environment as UCD was a “hotbed of countercultural ferment” fueled in part by Stewart Brand’s *Whole Earth Catalogue* (first published in 1968) and UCD’s annual picnic day which was rebranded in 1969 as the “Whole Earth Festival.”<sup>153</sup> Brand’s publication and the festival promoted environmental sustainability and a wider level of consciousness towards the environment and one’s relationship to it which directly related to Cicansky’s childhood in East End Regina where many people grew their own food.

When asked directly about the wrecked VW bus in *This is the fountain you’ve been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites* and whether or not it was autobiographical in some way or a comment on the hippie movement, Cicansky explained during his various road trips, he had noticed how much trash people put into water “as if the water would somehow get rid of the garbage.”<sup>154</sup> This surprising answer, layered with all the symbols discussed thus far, hippie modernism, Cicansky’s time at UCD, his experiments with living off the land in a small town, the Great Funk of the 1970s, and “the mosquito bites,” leads to a complicated abundance of symbols and allegories which unfold over time. The fountain is the story of the history of life on earth (rocks, water, trees, love and fertility) framed by Cicansky’s critical take on the utopic future imaginings of the stereotypical hippie (VW bus). Blauvelt notes in “The Barricade and the Dance Floor: Aesthetic Radicalism and the Counterculture,” that hippie modernism was

fundamentally, a form of projection not just negation—one that envisions utopic potentials, models alternative experiences, and channels liberatory futures. It is situated historically as a momentary disruption between postwar modernism and its postindustrial aftermath. It is a bridge that connects across this historical chasm, but it is also one that catalyzes the contemporary zeitgeist—both cultural and political.<sup>155</sup>

The fountain is also a bridge between the cliched images of the failed counterculture hippie of the 1960s that was taken up by conservative thinkers in the 1970s and the continued potency of hippie modernism’s projects associated with current environment and social movements.<sup>156</sup> This fountain is an allegory of mid 1970s hippie modernism. The hippie modernist (like the Arts and Craft reformers) looked to the past in order to imagine a utopic future while also wanting to be closer to nature and the cosmos. However, in the process of extracting inspiration from the past, the pioneer and Victorian

aesthetics that were so inspirational to the hippie modernist are mixed and turned upside down just as the ordered papered walls of the ruined domestic interior are out of order and no longer follow the rules of the “experts” of the past. In terms of a projection of a utopic future, yes this is the fountain you’ve been waiting for all your life, with life giving waters and lustful moments but those waters are polluted with tires, crushed crates, a submerged vehicle, and are tapped for resource extraction (note the spigot on the side of the stump which is plumbed to drain the fountain) (fig. 33). The fountain is a visual representation of Cicansky’s experiences living off the land. The present/future isn’t a utopic one as those pesky mosquitos will attest to; those bites are meant to make one aware of the current state of the planet while also appreciating its history.

The open-roofed ruined domestic structure in *This is the fountain you’ve been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites* found atop a foundation of logs and stones with a miniature overstuffed ceramic chair inside is a rather non-descript building and can relate back to any number of domestic structures in Cicansky’s past and present. However, other ceramic structures in various states of ruin relate directly to Cicansky’s early years in the late 1940s as a 14-year-old outhouse builder, making those pieces much more autobiographical in nature.<sup>157</sup> He recalls:

I enjoyed construction work. I had a knack for building. Along with my regular job, I started my own construction company called ‘The Garlic Flats Syndicate’ and specialized in building outhouses. The sewer and water lines had not yet been extended to our part of town but the City did provide a can and the owner was required to build an outhouse for its use. I saw this as a business opportunity and built outhouses out of recycled lumber, and even incorporated into the design, a built-in rack for the Eaton’s catalogue. The outhouse business was pretty good until the sewer and water lines were extended to the Garlic Flats and outhouses were abandoned in favour of indoor plumbing and the flush toilet. Unfortunately, not one of the outhouses survived to tell the story of that history. Years later, the outhouses idea resurfaced again in a series of outhouse sculptures in clay.<sup>158</sup>

*Mixed Farming*, 1973 (fig. 40) and *Singing the Joys of an Agrarian Society*, c. 1972 (fig. 41) are two examples from the outhouse series.

*Mixed Farming* and *Singing the Joys of an Agrarian Society* are no longer atop a single large ruin of a tree in the form of a stump yet both still have logs “folded” within the foundations of the structures.<sup>159</sup> In amongst a variety of other ceramic symbols related specifically to Cicansky such as rocks (geologic time and nature’s creative power),



vegetables (growing food within one's own backyard the industrial agri-food complex and the knowledge his grandmother passed on to him), Venus (love and reproduction), and feces (to be discussed shortly in relation to Arneson and Funk ceramics), are miniature ceramic logs (life on earth and time), no longer arranged in an orderly manner that appears structurally sound (as seen in *This is the fountain you've been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites*) but folded in amongst the debris found in the pit of an outhouse. These outhouse structures sit on very precarious, disorganized foundations. Ceramic wooden boards are also folded into the foundations, and the entire outhouse structures are made with them as well. Wood is very much still a part of the story here.



**Figure 40** Victor Cicansky, *Mixed Farming*, 1973. Earthenware, glaze, lustre, plastic flowers on plywood base, 51 x 39 x 37.5 cm. Collection: MacKenzie Art Gallery, gift of the artist, 1998-36. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

In Cicansky's 1983 solo exhibition catalogue *Victor Cicansky: Clay Sculpture*, Curator Bruce W. Ferguson discusses the outhouses and other mise-en-scène pieces from the 1970s in terms of regionalism and more specifically “a region which we call ‘rural’ or ‘agricultural.’”<sup>160</sup> He even, while rightly pointing out the chauvinistic nature of the female

nude embracing the phallic pickle in *Mixed Farming*, interprets her as a “farmer’s daughter.”<sup>161</sup> This might explain why Nemiroff and others have read Cicansky’s work as bucolic and agrarian. However, as Cicansky has clearly stated, the outhouse series derives from memories of structures he built while growing up in the “Garlic Flats” (also known as Germantown) in Regina in the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s. This area of Regina occupied the east-end of the city and was called Germantown because it was mainly populated by new immigrants of German, Hungarian, and Romanian descent. Curator Carol A. Phillips recalls this area of her childhood:

Early in the century, Regina’s east end was known as ‘Germantown.’ It remains the ‘ethnic’ neighbourhood. Within the few square miles bordered by College Avenue to the south, Dewdney Avenue to the north, Broad Street to the west, and to the east the prairie, the east Europeans came just before and after World War I, and added ‘colour’ to what was essentially an Anglo-Canadian town. They came with their funny names, sheepskin jackets and tags pinned to their children; built the tiny houses, tended the large gardens and worked at jobs no one else would take; janitors in the corridors of power, immigrants.<sup>162</sup>

In terms of basic infrastructure such as running water, sewer, and garbage pickup, the city neglected this area, and it did not get adequate services until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century—hence the need for outhouses (my mother remembers visiting a friend in the late 1960s who lived in this part of Regina and still did not have indoor plumbing).<sup>163</sup> It would not be out of place to attribute one of the contributing factors of this neglect to ethnicity and class. As noted, Germantown bordered the prairie, and many people kept large vegetable gardens. Some even had livestock which complicates the stereotypical binary of urban versus rural. This made for a mysterious mix of backyard agriculture, urban development, and ethnically motivated neglect. The presence of outhouses, large gardens, and livestock has led some art critics to interpret Cicansky’s work as being totally agrarian rather than a mixture of both. While some might read, and this has generally been the case, the allegorical meaning in a piece such as *Singing the Joys of an Agrarian Society* as a playfully nostalgic kitsch-filled celebration of regional agrarian life from times past, I argue that by unfolding metaphors and symbols related to material, ceramics, and craft, the outhouses transform from allegorical miniatures celebrating a nostalgic past to allegorical radioactive fossils.



**Figure 41** Victor Cicansky, *Singing the Joys of an Agrarian Society*, c. 1972. Earthenware, glaze, lustre, plastic flowers, 49.0 x 35.0 x 34.0 cm. Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, gift of the artist 1996-85. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

Let's unpack the concept of radioactivity by returning first to the fossil. Fossils facilitate encounters between lost things and cultural absence.<sup>164</sup> As noted earlier, a fossil is a trace made permanent and can metaphorically relate to ceramics as clay is of the earth and can preserve trace in a way that no other material can. Memories are fossilized when it becomes impossible to actually remember them yet images and objects, including ruins, associated with those memories still exist, confronting those who unearth or engage with the objects. Laura U. Marks folds additional complexity into the metaphor of the fossil by introducing the "radioactive fossil," a cinematic image, a live and dangerous thing, described by Deleuze as exuding an "unsettling quality."<sup>165</sup> Radioactive fossils are disquieting, strange, and stubborn as they arise from a past that might not quite match current understandings of said past.

Cicansky's outhouses are radioactive fossils as they are ceramic reminders of a time in Regina's history when certain groups of people were not given adequate access to water and sewer services, and they are radioactive because they require "unearthing" or

thinking about in a layered metaphorical way as they can easily be dismissed as nostalgic renderings of the past. Each outhouse is a miniaturized ruin and as already stated, ruins are easily erased. In fact, Cicansky has even noted that no actual outhouses remain in the east end of Regina, not even ruins, effectively erasing a part of Regina's past that othered and suppressed a specific area of the city filled with people of non-Anglo backgrounds. By fossilizing in the form of a ceramic miniature his memory of the outhouses in east end Regina, outhouses he crafted with his own hands, Cicansky makes visible through allegory something that has been effectively and purposefully erased.



**Figure 42** Slide of a ceramic *Perfume Burner in the Form of a Dove-cote* produced by Chelsea Porcelain Factory in the 18<sup>th</sup> century from Victor Cicansky's personal slide collection. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

It is unsettling to be confronted by something, like an outhouse, that is so familiar yet also unfamiliar when the historic context comes into the mix. However, making miniature ruins of outhouses alone does not make these objects radioactively unsettling; it's a start, but there is more at play with Cicansky's work. All too often, the allegorical narrative of the nostalgic joys of a past agrarian society filled with hardworking immigrants drowns out the potentiality of the unsettling side of this series. The allegorical unsettling for me began while I was unearthing material for this paper in Cicansky's private slide library. While looking through image after image, I was suddenly confronted by an image of a *Perfume Burner in the Form of a Dove-cote*, 1759–65 (fig. 42). The

slide functioned as a radioactive fossil, unsettling my understanding of the outhouse series by stubbornly hanging around in my thoughts until I connected this image to the history of ceramics and Cicansky's outhouse series, which in turn enabled me to solidify my understanding of his position as an innovative craft-based maker.<sup>166</sup>



**Figure 43** Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory, *Perfume Burner in the Form of a Dove-cote*, 1759–1765. Soft-paste porcelain, 51.6 x 23.3 x 21 cm. Collection: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wrightsman, 1971, 1971.206.25. Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/205429>.



**Figure 44** Chelsea Porcelain Factory, *Potpourri Vase*, c. 1756. Soft-paste porcelain painted with enamels, 36.8 x 20.9 cm. Collection: Victoria and Albert Museum, Given by E. F. Broderip, Esq., C.135-1926. Source: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The *Perfume Burner in the Form of a Dove-cote* was a model produced by the Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory during the 18<sup>th</sup> century in very limited numbers.<sup>167</sup> Slight variations have been noted among the known burners (figs. 43 & 44); for example, different animals are included alongside the doves or pigeons just as a variety of animals appear in Cicanky's pieces, and the miniature dovecote, a type of vernacular architecture just like the east end outhouse, is either placed atop a base of rococo scrollwork or perched upon a rocky base. In both—*Mixed Farming* (fig. 40) and the Chelsea perfume burner (fig. 42)—there is a dramatic sense of the chaotic fold which is uncannily similar to the folded and piled foundations in the outhouse series. The dovecote perfume burners with their pierced walls were used to hold potpourri, and the turrets contained incense pastilles.<sup>168</sup> These sweetly smelling luxurious porcelain objects<sup>169</sup> were, according to a 19<sup>th</sup> century domestic guide, ideally placed in a lady's dressing room or within the niches of the drawing room: "The first point of consideration must be that which first strikes the sense on entering this apartment of sweets [the dressing room] and which the most gallant admirer must acknowledge is dependant [sic] upon the smell, even before the sight."<sup>170</sup> Smell and the purposeful placement of these historical pieces within the domestic sphere was vitally important. In light of the similarities between the *Perfume Burner in the Form of a Dove-cote* and Cicansky's outhouse series, I can't help but think of smell in relation to Cicansky's outhouses and the attempted erasure of part of Regina's not so savoury past.

With all this considered, it becomes hard not to experience *Singing the Joys of an Agrarian Society* as a radioactive fossil. The fossilized miniature wooden ruin, balanced precariously atop a pile of refuse of logs, rotting vegetables, and ceramic turds, is not so easily erased. The work's ceramic sources are the material culture of the elite—luxury in the form of sweet smells and white gold (porcelain)—yet its subject matter is excrement, and its manifestation is the hand-made, make-do, wooden vernacular buildings and work arounds adopted by a neighbourhood neglected by those in power. All of this is expressed via white earthenware rather than porcelain, and the juxtaposition is radioactively unsettling.



**Figure 45** Victor Cicansky, *Singing the Joys of an Agrarian Society* (detail), c. 1972. Earthenware, glaze, lustre, plastic flowers, 49.0 x 35.0 x 34.0 cm. Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, gift of the artist 1996-85. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Through juxtaposition, Cicansky doubles down on the radioactivity of this piece. Take a closer look at what's inside the outhouse, behind the cute cherub who, by the way, is standing on a stump. The ruin frames a fountain, gushing with bright blue water sitting atop a ceramic turd (fig. 45). In his correspondences with Nemiroff, Cicansky explained that “The fountain was inspired by the one in Wascana Park brought to Regina from London, England. I suppose the argument could be made that this series represents the agrarian back-side of the ‘rural/urban split’ in my work.”<sup>171</sup> *Trafalgar Fountain*, c. 1845 was designed by Sir Charles Barry (1795–1860) as one of two fountains that were originally installed in Trafalgar Square in London, England.<sup>172</sup> The two fountains were eventually given as gifts to a “Dominion Capital,” Canada, and one was installed in Regina in 1963 while the other went to Ottawa, ON. Since their inception, fountains have served decorative, religious, political, and practical purposes including as visible manifestations of the harnessing of water for public use, sites of religious significance and poetic or artistic contemplation, and theatrical displays of a political or historical nature.<sup>173</sup> *Trafalgar Fountain* serves as a symbol of Regina’s colonial history as fountains have been used to symbolize the benevolence, authority, and wealth of those in power, and this fountain in particular symbolizes these things as it was a gift from England to

one of its colonies. The juxtaposition of this symbol inside the outhouse, a symbol of the lack of infrastructure provided to the east end of Regina for far too long, increases *Singing the Joys of an Agrarian Society's* metaphorical radioactivity. The ceramic turd is also significant as it serves as the foundation for the fountain—a political gesture in itself—but it also can be traced back to Robert Arneson's "ceramic emblems," lustered turds found in the bowls of a number of his Funky toilets. Arneson equated the manipulation of wet clay and the pleasure that comes with it to excretion, subverting the intellectualism associated with fine art and some forms of fine craft.<sup>174</sup> The ceramic turd in relation to Cicansky can be read as a symbol for Arneson's amateurism, material fascination, and its subversive anti-intellectual craft and art politics. The juxtaposition of fountain with ceramic turd, in a form that references luxury (the porcelain potpourri burner) yet is made from a clay body that is associated with the amateur, also radioactively unsettles preconceived notions of high and low culture. Without thinking through these layers of ceramic history and materiality, the overt nostalgic story described above can definitely become the more dominant narrative, but the two allegories, the strong self-sufficient urban agrarian immigrant community and the civic neglect of an area of the city, should be understood in terms of complementing and folding in upon each other.

Just as the radioactive, unsettling message of the outhouse series unearths an unresolved past of prejudice and oppression, the strong sense of community and the ingenuity of the people of the Garlic Flats should not be forgotten. Cicansky is able to create this balance by framing allegory, layered symbolism, humour, and a sense of joy all into one. More often than not, it is symbolic wood that serves as foundation or frame for his radioactive fossils.

### **By Way of Virtuality: Cicansky as Gardener**

"The meeting of tree with man is filled with drama. The tree started life in an earlier period of history; mature and fulfilled, it has finally succumbed to the woodsman's ax and saw. This could be the end. Or the tree could live again... The tree's fate rests with the woodworker. In hundreds of years its lively juices have nurtured its unique substance. A graining, a subtle colouring, an aura, a presence will exist this once, never to reappear. It is to catch this moment, to identify with this presence, to find this fleeting relationship, to capture its spirit, which challenges the woodworker."<sup>175</sup> – George Nakashima



“The kitchen table and its contents still occupies my imagination. Food we ate, its visual presentation, aroma and steaming presence on the table, left me with warm memories of family dinners. The table connected us with the garden, with the prairie environment, with important new world festivals and the culture of Romania. What gave the table beauty and meaning was its usefulness in giving us our daily bread.”<sup>176</sup> – Victor Cicansky



**Figure 46** Victor Cicansky, *The Pantry Shelf*, 1979. Earthenware, lustre, commercial decals, cedar, 185.5 x 132 x 34.5 cm. Collection: SK Arts, 1979-303. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

While allegory played and continues to play an important role in Cicansky’s work from the 1970s on, he does not abandon the creation of attesting symbolic objects such as the *Pile of Shirts* (fig. 21) he made while at UCD. Notable symbolic objects include the ceramic preserves and pantry shelves (fig. 46) first made in 1978 and potted plants such as *Cabbage with Hailstones*, 1982 (fig. 81). On a side note, Cicansky also metaphorically potted pieces of ruined ceramic wall as seen in *Wallpaper Flowers*, 1974 (fig. 65), creating a powerful symbolic gesture of the potentiality of growth from decay and ruin, of past and present growing towards a new future. The 1980s were also occupied by ceramic chairs, books, columns, and mural work, all symbolic and allegorical in nature. However, examples such as *Garden Talk*, 1987 (fig. 47) or *Garden Ruins*, 1986 (fig. 48) do not engage as deeply with material, ceramics, or craft compared to the earlier examples discussed in this chapter. For example, *Garden Talk* focuses on narrative, the culture of gardening, and growing one’s own food. *First Summer Salad*, 1984 (fig. 49) compares well with Arneson’s *Smorgi Bob, The Cook*, 1971<sup>177</sup> in terms of the dramatic perspectival rendering of a table replete with food, but conceptually they are far apart as

the food on Cicansky's table is grown by the subject standing behind the table, and the subject is not the artist himself dressed up like a chef. The table in *First Summer Salad* is significant as it hints at Cicansky's return to material and the functional domestic object, in particular the table, not seen since *The Last Picnic* (fig. 23).



**Figure 47** Victor Cicansky, *Garden Talk*, 1987. Earthenware, commercial glaze, 44 x 47.5 x 41.5. Collection: Art Gallery of Burlington, Purchased through a generous donation from Longo's Fruit Market, Burlington, Ontario and a grant from the Ministry of Culture and Communication, Province of Ontario, 1987, 1987.038.0.1. Source: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.



**Figure 48** Victor Cicansky, *Garden Ruins* (installation view), 1986. Earthenware, glaze, Size varies with installation (cabbages are life-size). Collection: Art Gallery of Burlington, Donated by the Artist, 1992, 1992.026.0.23. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



**Figure 49** Victor Cicansky, *First Summer Salad*, 1984. Earthenware, glaze, wood, acrylic paint, 57 x 35.6 x 11 cm. Collection: John A. Miller and Andrey Tarasiuk, Stratford, Ontario. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.



**Figure 50** Victor Cicansky, *Pepper Shovel*, 1986. Bronze, patina, edition A/C, 35.5 x 21.2 x 12 cm. Collection: Don Thauberger. Source: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

In May of 1986, Cicansky received a Saskatchewan Arts Board Senior Arts Award which enabled him to cast a number of larger garden-themed sculptures in bronze at Joe Fafard's foundry, the Julienne Atelier Inc. in Pense, SK.<sup>178</sup> These early casts are small and large surrealistic vegetable-shovel hybrid sculptures such as *Pepper Shovel*, 1986 (fig. 50) and *October Corn*, 1986 (fig. 51). Bronze has a rich history. It has been used by various cultures in Asia, Europe, and Africa. For example, Greek and Roman sculptors used bronze to sculpt likenesses of gods, heroes, and people in positions of power such as the Roman *Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius*, c. 175. Consequently, bronze statues are associated with power and divine grandeur. Just imagine how different Susan Velder's 2005 equestrian sculpture of Queen Elizabeth II, installed in Wascana Park in Regina, would be if it were made of ceramic, glass, wood, or even iron rather than bronze. Bronze symbolizes power, and it is expensive to use.<sup>179</sup> When casting something in bronze, all these symbolic material associations and the deep connection to the public monument that can be traced all the way back to classical times add to the meaning of the work.

Cicansky's bronze furniture-making practice began in the 1990s, which coincided with his move from Craven to Regina, when "studio furniture" saw a return to the modernist spirit of "truth to materials" as wood was exposed, clear glass was widely used, and bold undifferentiated colour planes were favoured over pattern.<sup>180</sup> Much like Blunk and other expressive woodworkers of the 1960s, in the late 1970s and 1980s, many furniture designers pursued experimental and individualistic projects. This was due in

part to the rise of postmodernism and as a response to the global economic slowdown which impacted commercial work.<sup>181</sup> These idiosyncratic explorations produced “studio furniture,” an approach to furniture making that broke from the dominant mid-century modern aesthetic. Studio furniture is generally not mass produced and is idiosyncratic. It is an intellectually intense examination of furniture’s social and formal properties and is occupied more with form, colour, material, and conceptual content than straightforward function.<sup>182</sup> An excellent Saskatchewan example is Regina’s Brian Gladwell’s cardboard *Console Table with Drawers*, 1988<sup>183</sup> as it conceptually engages with the connections between function and material.<sup>184</sup> As British designer Jasper Morrison recalls, the design innovations of the Italian Memphis Group were particularly influential: “It’s not the most practical kind of design but it had the effect of freeing everything up, to show that we don’t have to accept all these constraints and ridiculous rules about how one should design—design should be open to different ways of working.”<sup>185</sup> In light of Cicansky’s interest in Voulkos’ antagonism and craft’s search for freedom, it makes sense that design, and, in particular, the burgeoning studio furniture movement would appeal to him.



**Figure 51** Victor Cicansky, *October Corn*, 1986. Bronze, patina, acrylic paint, 165 x 65 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



**Figure 52** Victor Cicansky, *Onion Table*, 1991. Bronze, patina, acrylic paint, 76 x 76 x 30 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Cicansky's early tables transform from flattened pattern-filled ceramic renderings on the wall to actual tables with fruit and vegetables placed on the tops and in amongst the legs. *Onion Table*, 1991 (fig. 52) is one example, and although it may appear as if the table is made of wood, it is, in fact, made of bronze that appears to be wood. In order to create the look of milled wood, Cicansky carefully carved the texture of wood into sheets of Styrofoam just as he carved the texture of wood into the miniature ceramic walls of his outhouse series and into the back of *Stump Chair*.



**Figure 53** Victor Cicansky, *Bench Corn*, 1992. Bronze, patina, acrylic paint, edition 2/5, 116 x 202 x 56 cm. Collection: MacKenzie Art Gallery, gift of the artist, 1999-165. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.



**Figure 54** Victor Cicansky, *Garden Palette*, 1991. Bronze, patina, acrylic paint, wax, 128.5 x 60.2 x 42.2 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

In the case of *Bench Corn*, 1992 (fig. 53), the bench is made with a combination of real milled wood and gathered branches—structured and wild, transformed and raw. These branches are woven together to become the backs of benches, they also form the support structures for the solid table tops (fig. 54) and the benches, just as the logs were “foundational” in Cicansky’s earlier ceramic pieces. Cicansky quickly adopted (and is still using) his “burnt wood” casting technique: rather than carve other substances with wood-like textures, he casts directly from branches and pieces of wood (fig. 55). Typically, in the lost-wax bronze casting process, a positive (the object to be made of bronze) is made out of wax, and a mould is poured around the wax positive ensuring that all the fine details are captured. Once the mould is complete, the wax is burned out of the mould leaving room for the molten bronze to be poured into the empty cavity. When the bronze has cooled, the mould is removed, the bronze object is cleaned up, and various surface treatments, such as patinas or paints, can be applied to the surface. In the burnt wood process used for his furniture and bonsai pieces, real wood takes the place of the wax positive and is burnt out of the mould before the bronze is poured in. This is significant as Cicansky captures the actual physical and unique attributes of select pieces of wood and memorializes these actual ruins of trees. These are not remediations of wood. It is another form of fossilization, but this time, it is by way of a specific bronze casting technique.<sup>186</sup>



**Figure 55** Victor Cicansky assembling a bench in his studio. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



**Figure 56** Victor Cicansky gathering wood. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Reminiscent of the philosophies of American architect, furniture designer, and woodworker George Nakashima (1905–1990) whose words opened this section, the use of actual branches in his furniture is a way for Cicansky to honour the life of a tree.<sup>187</sup> He casts the gnarled and weathered branches of Western Canadian trees and shrubs. It is a very political, spiritual, and humbling act to take what the “colonial mindset” deems as mere kindling or brush to be removed in favour of the “efficient” use of the land and honour it by making it the subject of and foundational support for unique pieces of furniture. On occasion, Cicansky has visited the same tree or shrub numerous times in order to get to “know” it, to learn how to strategically harvest the most expressive branches from a respected living organism (fig. 56).<sup>188</sup> One of his favourite woods is hawthorn because of the expressive twists and turns found in the branches. Fleshy

Hawthorn (*Crataegus succulenta*), with its three centimeter long thorns, is a native Saskatchewan shrub that can grow up to five meters tall and is found in the moist mixed grassland and aspen parkland ecoregions of the province.<sup>189</sup> Cicansky has also harvested wood from specific areas; the wood used in *New Wreck Beach Coffee Table*, 2000 (fig. 57) comes from the famous British Columbian clothing-optional beach by the same name located adjacent to the University of British Columbia's campus where Cicansky had first worked with clay in 1961. To many, these pieces of wood are little more than kindling, unworthy of memorialization in the same way the gigantic, mythical redwoods of California deserve. Decorative arts curator Gerald W. R. Ward explains, "Historically, craftsmen exploited the characteristics of their material to their best advantage. In the case of wood, for example, craftsmen often give priority to revealing its beautiful grain, color, sheen, and figure, treating the material with a devotion bordering on reverence."<sup>190</sup> Cicansky, as craftsman, does this, but rather than selecting wood with beautiful grain, colour, and sheen, he works with and reveres wood from places that are important to him and are often overlooked but deserve just as much attention if they are to survive the Anthropocene age. Note how Cicansky describes some of the wood he has used: "Over the years the ancient small birches hugging the rocks near the water have grown into messy tangles of twisted branches creating a formidable mass to face the extremes of weather the seasons bring."<sup>191</sup> It is those pieces of ancient birch, pieces of wood with time and place woven into their very fibres, that he casts in bronze just as heroes of the past and present are cast in bronze.



**Figure 57** Victor Cicansky, *New Wreck Beach Coffee Table*, 2000. Bronze, patina, acrylic paint, 45.7 x 137.2 x 88.9 cm. Collection: Mea Cicansky. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.





**Figure 58** Victor Cicansky, *House and Garden Revisited*, 1993. Bronze, patina, paint, 94 x 89 x 30.5 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



**Figure 59** Gord Peteran, *A Table Made of Old Wood*, 2005. Wood, 83.8 x 106.7 x 43.2 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Other Canadian artists such as Gordon Peteran have designed and built tables out of wood. Consider the similarities between *House and Garden Revisited*, 1993 (fig. 58) by Cicansky and a *Table Made of Old Wood*, 2005 (fig. 59) by Peteran. The subject of both tables is wood and both makers have used a cumulative process in order to piece the tables together with wood that would normally be discarded. Peteran's table is made of processed, milled wood whereas Cicansky's table is made from cast pieces of small branches and slabs of bronze made to look like milled wood. Both tables also reference the relationship of wood to the home: Cicansky literally has a silhouette in steel of a home under the tabletop and Peteran's table is made from wood that very well might have come from a literal home. The potency of memory, time, and domesticity are manifested by way of the subject of wood. However, in Cicansky's piece, he has

memorialized the wood by way of bronze. Peteran is not honouring the wood as Cicansky does. Peteran's table is about making tables; Cicansky's table is about life. He cultivates objects that bring the garden and nature into the home.



**Figure 60** Installation shot of an unknown Cicansky solo exhibition at one of Douglas Udell's galleries. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

This brings me back to the *Stony Rapids Table with Plums* (fig. 2), which opened this chapter. After a difficult period in his personal life, Cicansky took a trip to Northern Saskatchewan where he was inspired by the land: "I spent the week of the summer solstice in a derelict cabin near Stony Rapids. I walked through the wilderness of trees and rocky places next to the rapids. The images on the forest floor, tangled up roots wrapped around rocks scoured by glacial ice and surrounded by water and sky, suggested a timeless, symbolic language of form and colour. I felt a strong need to assemble this visual information into a personal expression that captures the spirit of the place."<sup>192</sup> Upon his return, his table bases become more complex and interwoven with layered folds in response to what he saw when looking down at the forest floor. However, his solid topped tables did not facilitate an action of looking down at the complexity of nature. Around 1993, clear glass tops, instead of solid bronze ones, started to appear on Cicansky's tables, and this development is one of his most significant material engagements. Although the glass appears before his Stony Rapids trip, an increase in the amount of branches, folds, and chaotic weaving patterns paired with the act of looking down through glass at a domestic garden in the home creates a new level of conceptual complexity within Cicansky's mature work created after his Stony Rapids trip. Glass

facilitates the discovery, exploration, and creation of new worlds and realities. English professor John Garrison astutely points out in the book *Glass*, “the story of the history of glass is one about exploration and discovery. The microscope and the telescope enabled humans to imagine other worlds and distant lands, in turn powering exploration and colonialism.”<sup>193</sup> Take, for instance, natural philosopher and architect Robert Hooke’s 1665 description in his book, *Micrographia: Or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses with Observations and Inquiries Thereupon*, of the wonderous world seen by looking through glass:

By means of telescopes, there is nothing so far distant but may be represented to our view; and by the help of microscopes, there is nothing so small, as to escape our inquiry; hence there is a new visible world discovered to the understanding. By this means the heavens are opened, and a vast number of new stars, and new motions, and new productions appear in them, to which all the ancient astronomers were utterly strangers. By this the Earth itself, which lies so near us, under our feet, shows quite a new thing to us, and in every little particle of its matter; we now behold almost as great a variety of creatures, as we were able before to reckon up in the whole universe itself.<sup>194</sup>

From the detailed view of the body of a flea through a microscope,<sup>195</sup> to Columbus seeing “far off lands” and hence shortening the perceived distance between places,<sup>196</sup> to the glass on iPhone and computer screens, this rather invisible material has a long history with world creation, discovery, and knowledge.

Seeing unseen worlds and things by way of a microscopic or telescopic lens is a virtual experience. Glass artist Koen Vanderstukken explains in *Glass: Virtual, Real* that in terms of glass, “virtual” does not have the stereotypical meaning that is more aligned with physics or computer science; instead “virtual” is to be understood as a manifestation of an “image that is perceived differently by the eye than it is in reality, eg distant objects seen close up through a telescope.”<sup>197</sup> Put another way, “virtual” is used to describe the imaginary, otherworldly quality of glass and is the opposite of “real.”<sup>198</sup> Baudrillard echoes this notion of virtuality and its relation to glass:

glass implies a symbolism of access to a secondary state of consciousness, and at the same time it is ranked symbolically at zero level on the scale of materials. Its symbolism is one of solidification—hence of abstractness. This abstractness opens the door to the abstractness of the inner world: the crystal of madness; to the abstractness of the future: the clairvoyant’s crystal ball; and to the abstractness of nature: the other worlds to which the eye gains entry via microscope or

telescope. And certainly, with its indestructibility, immunity to decay, colourlessness, odourlessness, and so on, glass exists at a sort of zero level of matter.<sup>199</sup>

However, I disagree with Baudrillard's assertion that glass, as in the case of shop windows or jars containing food,<sup>200</sup> serves to only distance and exclude.<sup>201</sup> The virtual potential of glass does the exact opposite; it facilitates *abstract proximity* where new worlds and paradigms can take shape. Abstract is used here as Baudrillard uses it: glass is everywhere yet it is invisible, and it is liquid and solid all at once. It is an abstract material, and its abstractness opens the doors to inner worlds and the future. The virtual power of glass lies in the fact it can distance and exclude, but it can also make one feel intimately closer. Take note of what Baudrillard has to say about glass and gardens (a subject apropos to Cicansky): "Live in a garden in close intimacy with nature—experience the charm of every season totally, without giving up the comforts of a modern living space. This is the new heaven on earth, the grace bestowed by houses with picture windows."<sup>202</sup> The presence of glass in the form of a picture window allows people within a living space to feel a close proximity to the outdoors and nature without actually being that close to it as the glass physically separates occupant from exterior, but the occupant virtually and abstractly feels close to it. This is the *abstract proximity* of glass. Glass facilitates abstract proximity, and Cicansky uses this to his benefit with his tables where garden and nature are brought into the home and placed in close proximity to the user.



**Figure 61** Victor Cicansky, *Sofa Table*, 2005. Bronze, patina, paint, glass, 106.7 x 73.7 x 40.6 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

When exhibitions are filled with Cicansky's honouring of nature, the garden, life cycles, and trees, it is an otherworldly, virtual experience full of wonder (fig. 60). It can

be like walking through a forest that isn't quite real—it's uncanny. However, more often than not, Cicansky's tables are photographed from a lower vantage point so that the viewer of the photograph can see the table legs (fig. 61). When exhibited in galleries, the furniture is elevated on plinths so that visitors may appreciate the detail in the legs, but the plinths serve to separate the viewer from the object, altering the proximity between viewer and table. Consider how Cicansky's tables are experienced in a domestic setting. Typically, the user is not parallel to the table, crouched down for the optimum view of the web of branches. Instead, these table are experienced by way of an intimate proximity in a domestic setting. First, the hall table is typically approached from a standing position and one looks down through the glass into an otherworldly garden view. Second, the coffee table is typically experienced from a seated position, and the table is relatively close to the individual who looks down through the glass at the tops of leaves (fig. 62), fruit, and into basket-like nests (fig. 63). Third, the dining table is the most intimate when in use, as part of the diner's body is under the table top, and one looks down through the glass at branches, garden, and self. The tables are activated in the home when in use and less so in a gallery setting when on display, which makes them more akin to craft and design than to art.



**Figure 62** Victor Cicansky, *New Wreck Beach Pear Table*, 2007. Bronze, patina, acrylic paint, glass, 90.17 x 134.62 x 44.45 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Baudrillard notes rooms in domestic settings have developed over history from being simply associated with certain functions—food preparation, eating, and sleeping—to places of social interaction where entertaining and discussing can take place.<sup>203</sup> Cicansky's studio furniture expands upon this notion of the domestic space as a location for discourse and thinking because he troubles the separation between the inside and the outside as he brings his virtual gardens into the intimate social environment of the home

and takes advantage of the abstract proximity of glass. By way of the intimate proximity of domestic furniture, his tables invite and ask people to rediscover and reconsider their connections to nature (especially urban nature), which have been lost in modern, industrial society, by honouring the life of the tree. Cicansky is a virtual gardener both inside and outside the home as he cultivates actual living plants in his domestic garden and bronze gardens within the home as a way to engage with cultural memory and history. This consideration happens not by looking across the room and out a window at a distant view of nature that is separated by way of a glass panel but down and through glass at a virtual world where one's giant-like positioning warns of humankind's ability to mark this earth in giant-like fashion.



**Figure 63** Victor Cicansky, *Stony Rapids with Plum* (detail), 1997. Bronze, patina, acrylic paint, glass, 40.6 x 61.0 x 61.0 cm. Collection: Mary Ann Czekanski. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

In the three examples—the hall, coffee, and dining tables—the viewer looks down and through the glass (a virtual act) at a folded, basket-like form made of bronze wood that is reminiscent of the chaotic folds found in the *Abandoned Gladstone Bag*. This act of looking down and through glass at another abstract world is the same action and experience that takes place when looking through a microscope. But instead of looking at things unseen to the naked eye, Cicansky's microscope-like view reveals the tops of

leaves and fruit, worlds not associated with the domestic. As well as being a bird's eye view, looking down at the bronze tree through glass is similar to looking down and through the lens of a microscope. This is significant as it is not the bottoms of fruits or undersides of leaves as is normally seen when a human looks up at a sublime redwood tree, and especially considering that one sees into a nest, there is a sense that this is from a sky-like, all-seeing perspective—the perspective of the giant. As Stewart notes:

large lakes are formed when giants leave their footprints in the earth to be filled by rain; a roaring in the forest, or billowing waves in a field of grain, mark the passage of a giant.... But while the miniature represents a mental world of proportion, control, and balance, the gigantic presents a physical world of disorder and disproportion. It is significant that the most typical miniature world is the domestic model of the dollhouse, while the most typical gigantic world is the sky—a vast, undifferentiated space marked only by the constant movement of clouds with their amorphous forms... The giant is represented through movement, through being in time. Even in the ascription of the still landscape to the giant, it is the activities of the giant, his or her legendary actions, that have resulted in the observable trace. In contrast to the still and perfect universe of the miniature, the gigantic represents the order and disorder of historical forces."<sup>204</sup>

Giants are chaotic beings who leave sublime traces upon this earth just as human beings have left gigantic traces upon the earth. Through the virtuality of glass, the user is enveloped and pulled into this new world where the user takes on the perspective of the giant. This does not happen with Cicansky's solid top tables as one cannot look through them, and there is an absence of glass. Virtuality is about moving through space and time, and the giant is a being who does this as well, making it conceptually potent to combine a giant-like perspective with the virtuality of glass as a way to position the viewer to critically engage with existence on this earth.

Just as human giants look down and through the lens of a microscope at unseen worlds, the users of Cicansky's tables look down and through glass at the otherworldly, tangled mass of branches, fruits, and nests but the wood, fruit and nests are not miniaturized in relation to the human. Miniaturization in relation to the human body is the case with the ceramic dioramas discussed earlier, but the leaves, fruit, and nests in his bronze tables are life-size, complicating the positioning of the viewer as giant: you might very well have a giant's perspective, but don't think that makes you a giant or a god-like being. Although we think we are giants and we have done some giant-like things to the

planet in terms of destruction and alteration, we have not succeeded in miniaturizing nature—of controlling it, understanding it, or possessing it. Cicansky’s tables, by memorializing the insignificant pieces of wood (kindling) from a giant’s perspective, show us the minutia of nature is in fact not minutia at all. Cicansky invites us to regain our relationship with nature and to appreciate its importance by bringing it into the home by way of a virtual experience.

Land artist Walter De Maria (1935–2013) is quoted in Stewart’s book as lamenting “God has created the earth—and we have ignored it.”<sup>205</sup> Cicansky’s tables speak to this point exactly. The natural world is important and fundamental to the psyche. To know eggs come from chickens, to know what it feels like to rake leaves, to appreciate and marvel rather than curse at overripe fruit as it falls from branches having experienced season after season of the lifegiving cycle of nature is deeply important to Cicansky. His tables virtually and poetically, by way of material, coax the user to consider nature and one’s relationship and responsibility to this earth as giants and human beings—we are all gardeners of this earth.

### **Cicansky’s Crafted Path: Some Concluding Remarks**

“I am not interested in recreating a representation of the garden landscape. I see my work as an invocation celebrating the emotional state of being awestruck and full of wonderment in the face of nature.”<sup>206</sup> – Victor Cicansky



**Figure 64** Victor Cicansky, *February Pantry*, 1988. Painted wood, ceramic, 203.2 x 94.7 x 23 cm. Collection: National Gallery of Canada, 40388.1-70. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



In terms of craft and Cicansky's oeuvre, the Nemiroff exchange is revealing. One might suspect that the NGC's declaration that Cicansky's work had taken a different path from the gallery's was based on an art versus craft bias or be in part due to the fact that the curators had more than likely only experienced his work through photography and gallery exhibitions. Both of these forms of display in some regards work against the metaphorical potential of these pieces. Studio furniture as craft requires intimate proximity and is more often than not designed for the home. However, by the early 2000s, with the ever-expanding definition of craft and perhaps a reevaluation of the NGC's "path," the gallery did purchase two examples of his work: *February Pantry*, 1988 (fig. 64) and *Dining on Peaches and Pears*, 2000.<sup>207</sup> Yet curiously, the pantry and dining table are categorized under "sculpture." This is somewhat plausible for *February Pantry* but *Dining on Peaches and Pears* is quite obviously, as discussed in this chapter, an example of Canadian studio furniture. What makes this categorization even more revealing is the fact that Donald Judd's *Double Bench*, 1996 is categorized in the NGC's online catalogue as "decorative arts" leading one to speculate that craft is still a troublesome path. But maybe that is exactly what makes it, and the work of makers such as Cicansky, so appealing and potent. The most interesting objects are those that can't be easily categorized and cultivate within the user and viewer multiple meanings and discourse.

This chapter has analyzed some of these "troublesome" objects by focusing on Cicansky's engagement with various materials and processes: defining acts of a craftsman. Material engagement has enabled Cicansky to explore themes associated with regionalism, place, the garden, and his Romanian ethnicity. The objects themselves are deeply conceptual with multiple meanings and interpretations and are not just nostalgic, bucolic narratives. His preoccupation with materials and labour also reveals his career-long engagement with craft and its ever-changing definition from certain types of things to an approach or way of doing things.

Each section in this chapter focused on a small body of work in order to demonstrate how Cicansky's sustained engagement on a physical and metaphorical level with materials and the constraints associated with said materials is a constant within his practice. The first section focused on process in order to argue that since the 1960s,

Cicansky has been at the forefront of craft, revealing just how significant he is to the history of Canadian craft and even to American studio craft. At first, as a budding potter trained by Sures and inspired by Voulkos, Cicansky antagonistically pushed the boundaries of the material of clay and the discipline of ceramics itself by violating the vesselness of his pots and various other “rules” associated with ceramics—he pushed process to its limits. In the 1960s, craft was about pots, well-made utilitarian objects, and Cicansky made pots that weren’t quite pots. The second section of this chapter explored Cicansky’s use of metaphor and textiles while studying at UC Davis under the tutelage of Robert Arneson. During his grad studies, Cicansky abandoned his earlier antagonism towards clay, ceramics, and pottery and shifted towards a metaphorical exploration of material and process. His explorations into textiles and knowledge through facture are conceptually complex—those piles of shirts are not simply piles of clothing and those overstuffed armchairs are not just worn out pieces of furniture. Instead, these ceramic sculptures and the processes that went in to making them can be understood as symbols for knowledge, labour, and the (absent) body, which in turn complicate binary thinking and meaning. In the third section, I focused on some of the very pieces Nemiroff brought up in her letters, the outhouses including *Singing the Joys of an Agrarian Society*. Cicansky started to make these ceramic ruins upon his return to Saskatchewan when he employed craft, symbol, allegory, and materials in order to explore his childhood in Regina in both a celebratory and critical way. This duality has often been overlooked in his work. While these miniature dioramas have typically been understood as nostalgic celebrations of the past, they are more complex. They are radioactive fossils that also remind people of Regina’s discriminatory past and emerge from the ceramic allegorical fountains he made which reflect upon modernism, hippie modernism, and the culture of the 1970s. The ceramic outhouses are fossilized ruins of buildings erased from Regina’s urban environment, making visible ethnic histories otherwise “sanitized” from the streets of Regina. The final section of the chapter focused on Cicansky’s bronze work. Beginning in the 1990s and with Cicansky’s return to living in Regina, gardening and ecological issues became increasingly important to him and he expressed this by way of material (wood and bronze) and metaphor (the garden). His functional tables bring nature

and the garden into the home, challenging people to think about their place and responsibilities on this earth.

Craft, with its ever-changing definition and materials, brings clarity to Cicansky's oeuvre, fostering connections between his ceramics and bronzes. While the materials might be different, they are not as different as one might think and understanding them in terms of art versus craft is reductive. Cicansky's crafted path is replete with a nuanced understanding of materials and process, and through craft, his decades-long quest for knowledge and ways to make the world a better place is revealed.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Greenhalgh, "Introduction: Craft in a Changing World," in *The Persistence of Craft*, ed. Paul Greenhalgh (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Cicansky to Diana Nemiroff, October 3, 1997, "Victor Cicansky. Personal and Professional Papers. 1953–2000," 2005-53, box 7, folder 92, University of Regina Archives and Special Collections, Regina, SK.

<sup>3</sup> The list includes *Canadian Fine Craft* at Expo 67 in Montreal, QC (1967); *Contemporary Ceramic Art: Canada, USA, Mexico and Japan* at the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto, Japan (1971); *International Ceramics 1972* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, England (1972); *Canada Trajectoires 73* at the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris in Paris, France (1973); *Chairs: A Serious, Comic, Metaphysical, Insane, Feet-on-the-Ground Examination of the Burning Issue of "Chairness"* at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, ON (1975); *Contemporary Ceramic Art in the World*, The Kyushu Ceramic Museum, Saga, Japan (1981); *Do you take this Seriously? Irony, Wit and Humour from the Canadian Prairies As Perceived by Twenty-Three Artists Through Prints and Small Sculptures* at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, AB (1984); *The Time of the American Farm* at the Evanston Art Centre in Evanston, IL (1988) and *A Treasury of Canadian Craft: Inaugural Exhibition, The Canadian Craft Museum*, Canadian Craft Museum, Vancouver, BC (1992).

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the Regina Clay group see Timothy Long, ed. *Regina Clay: Worlds in the Making* (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Victor Cicansky to Diane Nemiroff, May 14, 1997, "Victor Cicansky. Personal and Professional Papers. 1953–2000," 2005-53, box 7, folder 92, University of Regina Archives and Special Collections, Regina, SK.

<sup>6</sup> Janice Seline to Victor Cicansky, July 2, 1997, "Victor Cicansky. Personal and Professional Papers. 1953–2000," 2005-53, box 7, folder 92, University of Regina Archives and Special Collections, Regina, SK.

<sup>7</sup> Victor Cicansky to Diana Nemiroff, July 24, 1997, "Victor Cicansky. Personal and Professional Papers. 1953–2000," 2005-53, box 7, folder 92, University of Regina Archives and Special Collections, Regina, SK.

<sup>8</sup> Diana Nemiroff to Victor Cicansky, August 15, 1997, "Victor Cicansky. Personal and Professional Papers. 1953–2000," 2005-53, box 7, folder 92, University of Regina Archives and Special Collections, Regina, SK.

<sup>9</sup> Victor Cicansky to Diana Nemiroff, October 3, 1997, "Victor Cicansky. Personal and Professional Papers. 1953–2000," 2005-53, box 7, folder 92, University of Regina Archives and Special Collections, Regina, SK.

<sup>10</sup> Victor Cicansky to Diana Nemiroff, October 3, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Fariello traces the connection of these specific materials to craft with the formation of The American Craft Council in the early 1940s. The Council defined craft in America as almost exclusively made of clay, wood, fiber, metal and glass. M. Anna Fariello, "Making and Naming: The Lexicon of Studio Craft," in *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 39.

<sup>13</sup> David Revere McFadden, "Artifice and Authenticity: Defining Craft," in *Defining Craft 1: Collecting for the New Millennium*, by David Revere McFadden and Ursula Ilse-Neuman (New York: American Craft Museum, 2000), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce Metcalf, "Contemporary Craft: A Brief Overview," in *Exploring Contemporary Craft: History, Theory and Critical Writing*, ed. Jean Johnson (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2002), 14.

<sup>15</sup> Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 3–4.

<sup>16</sup> Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 39.

<sup>17</sup> Garth Clark, "How Envy Killed the Crafts [2008]," in *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford: New York, 2010), 450.

<sup>18</sup> Yale University Art Professor, Jules David Prown, defines a "field" as a subject of investigation and a "discipline" as a mode of investigation. Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," in *Art as Evidence: Writing on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 70.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Mathieu, "But is it (ceramic) Art? Ceramics and the 'Problem' with Jean-Pierre Larocque's Exhibition at the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art," in *Craft Perception and Practice: A Canadian Discourse*, vol. 3, eds. Paula Gustafson, Nisse Gustafson and Amy Gogarty (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2007), 113.

<sup>20</sup> Victor Cicansky to Diana Nemiroff, October 3, 1997.

<sup>21</sup> In fact, even the Nemiroff exchange was understood in terms of regionalism when curator Terrence Heath discussed it in the *Border Crossings* article "The Art of Regional Nationalism." Terrence Heath, "The Art of Regional Nationalism," *Border Crossings* 19, iss. 1 (February 2000): 12–13.

<sup>22</sup> Moncrieff Williamson, *Canadian Fine Crafts* (Ottawa: Queen's Printers, 1967), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Victor Cicansky, "Artsmart Lecture," March 30, 2007, Victor Cicansky Papers, private collection.

<sup>24</sup> Sandra Alföldy, "Moncrieff Williamson, Maritime Regionalism, and the Dream of a National Craft Museum," *The Journal of Canadian Art History* 28 (2007): 40.

<sup>25</sup> Lee Plested, *From Our Land: The Expo 67 Canadian Craft Collection* (Charlottetown: Confederation Centre Art Gallery, 2005), 8.

<sup>26</sup> "Canadian artists at Expo 67," *Expedition* (CBC), recorded 1967, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1809471592>, accessed May 15, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Sandra Alföldy, *Crafting Identity: The Development of Professional Fine Craft in Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 87.

<sup>28</sup> Dorothy Todd Hénaut, "1967 – The Moment of Truth for Canadian Crafts," *artscanada* 24, no. 104 (January 1967): 21–22.

<sup>29</sup> For example, the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus establishes a ceramics program in 1965 and hires professional potter Jack Sures as a special lecturer. Julia Krueger, "Chronology," in *Tactile Desires: The Work of Jack Sures*, ed. Virginia Eichhorn (Regina & Owen Sound: MacKenzie Art Gallery & Tom Thomson Art Gallery, 2011), 187.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Sandra Alföldy notes that between 1965 and 1980, ten provincial craft councils were incorporated: the Alberta Craft Council (1980); the Crafts Association of British Columbia (1973); the Manitoba Crafts Council (1978); the New Brunswick Crafts Council (1972); the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador (1972); the Nova Scotia Designer Crafts Council (1973); the Ontario Crafts Council (1976); the Ontario Craft Foundation (1966); the Prince Edward Island Crafts Council (1965); the Conseil des métiers d'art du Québec (1972); and the Saskatchewan Craft Council (1975). Alföldy, *Crafting Identity*, 203 and 259.

<sup>31</sup> Alföldy, "Moncrieff Williamson, Maritime Regionalism, and the Dream of a National Craft Museum," 39.

<sup>32</sup> One of the most overt examples of this move away from the functional object is the textile work of Charlotte Lindgren. Williamson, *Canadian Fine Crafts*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Alföldy, *Crafting Identity*, 88–91.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Williamson, *Canadian Fine Crafts*, 49.

<sup>36</sup> Cicansky is included in the Williamson catalogue under the name "Victor Cicansky," and it lists Cicansky's pieces as one ceramic plate and a wine jug with glasses. However, the follow-up 2005 exhibition *From Our Land: The Expo 67 Canadian Craft Collection* does not list a plate but instead includes two lidded jars. When asked about this discrepancy, Cicansky recalls the lidded jars and wine set in relation to the Expo 67 exhibition but not a plate. Therefore, this might have been a publication error or the plate was broken at some point, more archival research is needed here. Williamson, *Canadian Fine Crafts*, 19; Plested, *From Our Land*, 54; and Julia Krueger to Victor Cicansky, "Expo 67 exhibition Question," e-mail correspondence, December 17, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> For a more in-depth discussion on the notion of the "vesselist" see Julia Krueger, "Jack Sures: The Constant Vesselist," *Studio* 13, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2018): 16–21.

<sup>38</sup> Janet Koplos and Bruce Metcalf, *Makers: A History of American Studio Craft* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 216–218. For publications available in the 1960s by or about these three which influenced

ceramics see: Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book* (London: Faber & Faber, 1940); Bernard Leach, *A Potter in Japan, 1952–1954* (London: Faber, 1960); and Sōetsu Yanagi, “The Way of Craftsmanship” [1927], in *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 167–176.

<sup>39</sup> Cicansky, “Artsmart Lecture,” March 30, 2007.

<sup>40</sup> I do realize that Voukos is a controversial figure within the history of ceramics but a discussion on this over-the-top male bravado is beyond the scope of this paper and is addressed by Jenni Sorkin in her essay “Gender and Rupture.” Jenni Sorkin, “Gender and Rupture,” in *Voukos: The Breakthrough Years*, ed. Glenn Adamson (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2016), 14–25.

<sup>41</sup> When Cicansky first mentioned reading an article on Voukos, I immediately thought of Rose Slivka’s 1961 article “The New Ceramic Presence” in *Craft Horizons*. Glenn Adamson touts Slivka’s article in *The Craft Reader* as “a good candidate for the single most famous piece of writing on American studio craft...mostly emanating from the circle of Peter Voukos through his teaching at the Otis Institute in Los Angeles.” However, in an e-mail correspondence, Cicansky confirmed that he had not read Slivka’s article. Julia Krueger to Victor Cicansky, “A question about Craft Horizons,” e-mail correspondence, February 20, 2019; Rose Slivka, “The New Ceramic Presence,” *Craft Horizons* 21, no. 4 (July/August 1961): 30–37; and Glenn Adamson, ed., *The Craft Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 525.

<sup>42</sup> The American Craftsmen’s Council’s 1957 conference at Asilomar in Monterey, California, brought together leading figures from the American design and craft worlds.

<sup>43</sup> F. Carlton Ball, “Craftsmen Talk it Over,” *Ceramics Monthly* 5, no. 8 (August 1957): 2.

<sup>44</sup> Stanley S. Walters, “Stretch Your Capabilities,” *Ceramics Monthly* 11, no. 7 (September 1966): 13.

<sup>45</sup> Janice Lovoss, “California Ceramics,” *Ceramics Monthly* 14, no. 10 (December 1966): 19.

<sup>46</sup> Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 44–46.

<sup>47</sup> Leach, *A Potter's Book*.

<sup>48</sup> For image see Glenn Adamson, ed. *Voukos: The Breakthrough Years* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2016), 163.

<sup>49</sup> For image see Jeannine Falino and Jennifer Scanlan, eds., *Crafting Modernism: Midcentury American Art and Design* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2011), 176.

<sup>50</sup> Frank A. Colson, “Cluster Pots,” *Ceramics Monthly* 14, no. 10 (December 1966): 16–18.

<sup>51</sup> Colson, “Cluster Pots,” 16.

<sup>52</sup> For image see Glenn Adamson, ed. *Voukos: The Breakthrough Years* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2016), 61.

<sup>53</sup> For image see Jonathan Fineberg, *A Troublesome Subject: The Art of Robert Arneson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 36.

<sup>54</sup> Katie Fitzrandolph, “Regina potter’s clay forms have malignant overtones,” *Leader-Post* (Regina, SK), December 5, 1967, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Arneson, quoted in Jonathan Fineberg, *A Troublesome Subject: The Art of Robert Arneson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 25.

<sup>56</sup> Cicansky, “Artsmart Lecture,” March 30, 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Julia Krueger to Victor Cicansky, “A question about Craft Horizons.”

<sup>58</sup> Roy DeForest to Victor Cicansky, November 25, 1967, “Victor Cicansky. Personal and Professional Papers. 1953–2000,” 2005-53, box 7, folder 92, University of Regina Archives and Special Collections, Regina, SK.

<sup>59</sup> Glenn Adamson describes Arneson’s pedagogical approach by way of a quote from Arneson who wanted “to treat ceramics as an art and this meant we had to deal with ideas and content. I am not concerned with process in the craft tradition.” Qtd. in Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 143.

<sup>60</sup> Bruce Nixon, “The Impact of TB-9,” in *30 Years of TB-9: A Tribute to Robert Arneson* (Davis: John Natsoulas Gallery, 1991), 9.

<sup>61</sup> Nixon, “The Impact of TB-9,” 11.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Selz, *Funk* (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1967), 3.

<sup>63</sup> Garth Clark and Margie Hughto, *A Century of Ceramics in the United States 1878-1978* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979), 159.

<sup>64</sup> Scott A. Shields, “California Funk,” in *The Ceramics Reader*, eds. Andrew Livingstone and Kevin Petrie (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 196.

<sup>65</sup> For image see Peter Selz, *Funk* (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1967), 13.

<sup>66</sup> Qtd. in Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 59.

<sup>67</sup> Levine is quoted as follows: “Jim Melchert came to Saskatchewan in February 1969 to conduct a workshop. At that time I had been a professional potter for about two years, and was just starting to feel the limits of the craft. About two months earlier, I had made my first sculptures. During the workshop, Jim gave an assignment to the group, and that was for each person to make a pair of shoes out of clay, and after they were done, we were to group them in the center of the floor, as if they were being worn by people in a cocktail party. At the prescribe time, I had only one shoe made, so I quickly made two little blobs of clay that looked like they were the bottom rubber parts of a pair of crutches, and placed one on each side of my shoe.” Note the use of the words “limits of craft” within Levine’s description of her work at that time. Quoted in Timothy Long, “A Fold in Time,” in *Marilyn Levine: A Retrospective*, ed. Timothy Long (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 1999), 30.

<sup>68</sup> Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 51.

<sup>69</sup> Amy Gogarty, “Remediating Craft,” in *Utopic Impulses: Contemporary Ceramics Practice*, eds. Ruth Chambers, Amy Gogarty and Mireille Perron (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2007), 91–110.

<sup>70</sup> Gogarty, “Remediating Craft,” 96.

<sup>71</sup> Qtd. in Gogarty, “Remediating Craft,” 101.

<sup>72</sup> Gogarty, “Remediating Craft,” 101.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Victor Cicansky, “University of Regina Lecture,” no date, Victor Cicansky Papers, private collection.

<sup>75</sup> Jessica Hemmings, “Part Introduction: Memory,” in *The Textile Reader*, ed. Jessica Hemmings (London: Berg, 2012), 57.

<sup>76</sup> Peter Stallybrass, “Worn Worlds: Clothes, Mourning, and the Life of Things,” in *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 30.

<sup>77</sup> Paul Mathieu, “The Brown Pot and the White Cube,” in *Utopic Impulses: Contemporary Ceramics Practice*, eds. Ruth Chambers, Amy Gogarty and Mireille Perron (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2007), 50.

<sup>78</sup> *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. “fossil,” accessed March 23, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fossil>.

<sup>79</sup> Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 84–85.

<sup>80</sup> Glenn Adamson, “Memory,” in *The Invention of Craft* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 181–239.

<sup>81</sup> Ethan W. Lasser, “Holding Memory: From Memories Held to Memories Lost,” in *Hiding Places: Memory in the Arts*, ed. Leslie Umberger (Sheboygan: John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 2011), 68.

<sup>82</sup> Kitty Hauser, “The Fingerprint of the Second Skin,” in *Fashion and Modernity*, eds. Christopher Breward and Caroline Evans (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 157.

<sup>83</sup> Victor Cicansky, “SOFA WEST lecture,” Santa Fe, no date, Victor Cicansky Papers, private collection..

<sup>84</sup> Victor Cicansky, *Up from Garlic Flats* (Regina: Radiant Press, 2019), 80.

<sup>85</sup> Pennina Barnett, “folds, fragments, surfaces: towards a poetics of cloth,” in *Textures of Memory: The Poetics of Cloth*, by Pennina Barnett and Pamela Johnson (Nottingham: Angel Row Gallery, 1999), 26.

<sup>86</sup> Yve Lomax, “Folds in the Photograph,” *Third Text: Third World Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture* 32 (Autumn 1995): 51.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Michel Serres, *Rome: The Book of Foundations*, trans. Felicia McCarren (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 236.

<sup>89</sup> Barnett, “folds, fragments, surfaces,” 26.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Qtd. in Barnett, “folds, fragments, surfaces,” 26.

<sup>92</sup> Barnett, “folds, fragments, surfaces,” 30.

<sup>93</sup> Rebecca Solnit, “The Ruins of Memory,” in *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 355.

<sup>94</sup> Victor Cicansky, unpublished memoir (Victor Cicansky Papers, private collection), 62.

<sup>95</sup> “Victor Cicansky, MFA 1970 File,” Nelson Gallery Archives, University of California, Davis, California.

<sup>96</sup> Stephen Watrous, “Russian Expansion to America,” Fort Ross Conservancy, 1998, <https://www.fortross.org/russian-american-company.htm#Fort%20Ross%20-%20The%20Russian%20Colony%20in%20California>, accessed March 24, 2019.

- <sup>97</sup> The original chapel was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake. It was rebuilt but then destroyed by fire on October 5, 1970. It was rebuilt again in 1973. Cicansky had completed his MFA studies before the October fire. “Fort Ross Chapel,” Fort Ross Conservancy, <https://www.fortross.org/chapel.htm>, accessed March 24, 2019.
- <sup>98</sup> There is an entire paper to be written here on the significance of inviting visitors to ingest the very liquid used to flood the ruins that is also alcohol. However, this is beyond the scope of this paper.
- <sup>99</sup> Solnit, “The Ruins of Memory,” 351.
- <sup>100</sup> Lowery Stokes Sims, “Wood in Contemporary Art, Craft and Design: Going ‘Against the Grain,’” in *Against the Grain: Wood in Contemporary Art, Craft and Design*, ed. Martina D’Alton (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2012), 17.
- <sup>101</sup> Judy Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 16.
- <sup>102</sup> Anne Massey, *Chair* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2011), 7.
- <sup>103</sup> I am indebted here to critic Elizabeth Bildner’s reading of Sebastian Errazuriz’s work. Sims, “Wood in Contemporary Art, Craft and Design,” 17.
- <sup>104</sup> David L. Barquist, “Druids and Dropouts: Working Wood, 1945–1969,” in *Crafting Modernism: Midcentury American Art and Design*, ed. Jeannine Falino (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2012), 226.
- <sup>105</sup> Barquist, “Druids and Dropouts,” 226.
- <sup>106</sup> Jennifer Dunlop Fletcher, “75 Reasons to Live: Jennifer Dunlop Fletcher on J. B. Blunk’s Invisible Presence,” San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, January 2010, <https://www.sfmoma.org/watch/75-reasons-to-live-jennifer-dunlop-fletcher-on-j-b-blunks-invisible-presence/>, accessed May 28, 2020.
- <sup>107</sup> Jean Baudrillard, “Natural Wood/Cultural Wood,” in *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1968), 38.
- <sup>108</sup> I have amended a list proposed by Lowery Stokes Sims. Sims, “Wood in Contemporary Art, Craft and Design,” 19.
- <sup>109</sup> Suzanne Ramljak, “Knocking on Wood,” in *Against the Grain: Wood in Contemporary Art, Craft and Design*, ed. Martina D’Alton (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2012), 122–123.
- <sup>110</sup> John Perlin, *A Forest Journey: The Role of Wood in the Development of Civilization* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), 25.
- <sup>111</sup> For image see Jonathan Fineberg, *A Troublesome Subject: The Art of Robert Arneson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 81.
- <sup>112</sup> Qtd. in Fineberg, *A Troublesome Subject*, 82.
- <sup>113</sup> Anthony Kiendl, “Little Worlds,” in *Little Worlds*, ed. Anthony Kiendl (Regina: Dunlop Art Gallery, 2001), 41–44.
- <sup>114</sup> Timothy Long, “Acknowledgements,” in *Regain Clay: Worlds in the Making*, ed. Timothy Long (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2005), 9.
- <sup>115</sup> Kiendl, “Little Worlds,” 41.
- <sup>116</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 75.
- <sup>117</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 67.
- <sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.
- <sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.
- <sup>120</sup> Victor Cicansky, “Convocation Address,” no date, Victor Cicansky Papers, private collection.
- <sup>121</sup> Glenn Adamson, “Craft and the Allegorical Impulse,” in *Material Perceptions, Documents in Contemporary Crafts*, no. 5, eds. Knut Astrup Bull and André Gali (Oslo: Norwegian Crafts, 2018), 98.
- <sup>122</sup> Adamson, “Craft and the Allegorical Impulse,” 106.
- <sup>123</sup> Victor Cicansky, “Rock Garden,” artist statement, July 26, 1998, Victor Cicansky Papers, private collection.
- <sup>124</sup> Victor Cicansky, in discussion with the author, August 15, 2019, Regina, SK.
- <sup>125</sup> Sarah Carr-Gomm, “Fountain,” *Dictionary of Symbols in Art: The Illustrated Key to Western Painting and Sculpture* (London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 1995), 95.
- <sup>126</sup> Britannica Academic, “fountain,” <https://academic-eb-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/levels/collegiate/article/fountain/35026>, accessed September 6, 2019.
- <sup>127</sup> Maria Ann Conelli and Marilyn Symmes, “Fountains as Propaganda,” in *Fountains Splash and Spectacle: Water and Design from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Marilyn Symmes (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1998), 77.
- <sup>128</sup> Cicansky, in discussion with the author, August 15, 2019.

- <sup>129</sup> For images visit Daughters of Chaos, <https://daughterofchaos.tumblr.com/post/183476209212/venus-and-adonis-fountain-royal-palace-of>.
- <sup>130</sup> Conelli and Symmes, "Fountains as Propaganda," 88.
- <sup>131</sup> Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most and Salvatore Settis, eds., "Cupid," in *The Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 244–246.
- <sup>132</sup> Cicansky, in discussion with the author, August 15, 2019.
- <sup>133</sup> Gill Saunders, *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 2002), 7–8.
- <sup>134</sup> Paul Mathieu, "The Simulation Esthetics: Illusion and (L)imitations," (self published chapter from the manuscript "The Art of the Future: 14 essays on ceramics"), <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DlhYxusGrpAHSWGGwKhUeEU7RknKioQ878ewqvlriz4/edit>, September 7, 2019.
- <sup>135</sup> Saunders, *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration*, 16.
- <sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.
- <sup>137</sup> Gill Saunders, "Wallpapers," in *The Cult of Beauty: The Victorian Avant-Garde 1860–1900*, eds. Lynn Federle Orr and Stephen Calloway (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), 134–139.
- <sup>138</sup> Sir Robert W. Edis, *Decoration & Furniture of Town Houses: A Series of Cantor Lectures Delivered Before the Society of Arts, 1880, Amplified and Enlarged* (New York: Scribner and Welford, 1881), 138–139.
- <sup>139</sup> Cicansky, in discussion with the author, August 15, 2019.
- <sup>140</sup> Carr-Gomm, "Bacchus," 36–37.
- <sup>141</sup> Ben Stewart, "Peace, Love, & the VW Bus: The Story of a Boxy Legend," *Popular Mechanics*, April 26, 2017, <https://www.popularmechanics.com/cars/trucks/a26207/volkswagen-microbus-vw-bus/>, accessed September 4, 2019.
- <sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>143</sup> Cicansky, in discussion with the author, August 15, 2019.
- <sup>144</sup> Andrew Blauvelt, "Preface," in *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, ed. Andrew Blauvelt (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2016), 11.
- <sup>145</sup> Blauvelt, "Preface," 13.
- <sup>146</sup> Richard Wasson, "The Making of a Counter Culture by Theodore Roszak," *College English* 31, no. 6 (March 1970): 625.
- <sup>147</sup> Blauvelt, "Preface," 11 and 12.
- <sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.
- <sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>150</sup> I am indebted to the thinking and research of Garth Johnson surrounding Cicansky's contribution to the avant-garde ceramic scene of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Garth Johnson, "A 'Nut' Grows in California," in *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener's Universe*, ed. Timothy Long (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2019), 37–55.
- <sup>151</sup> Thomas Hine, *The Great Funk: Styles of the Shaggy, Sexy, Shameless 1970s* (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2007), 3.
- <sup>152</sup> Nancy Janovicek, "Rural Countercultures," in *Back to the Land: Ceramics from Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands 1970–1985*, ed. Diane Carr (Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2012), 13.
- <sup>153</sup> Timothy Long, "Cicansky's Whole Earth Romanian Icon," in *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener's Universe*, eds. Timothy Long and Julia Krueger (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2019), 57–67.
- <sup>154</sup> Cicansky, in discussion with the author, August 15, 2019.
- <sup>155</sup> Andrew Blauvelt, "The Barricade and the Dance Floor: Aesthetic Radicalism and the Counterculture," in *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, ed. Andrew Blauvelt (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2016), 26.
- <sup>156</sup> Blauvelt, "The Barricade and the Dance Floor," 22, 26 and 29.
- <sup>157</sup> Cicansky, *Up from Garlic Flats*, 52.
- <sup>158</sup> Cicansky, "Convocation Address."
- <sup>159</sup> *Mixed Farming* might very well contain one of the earliest iterations of the dill pickle making it an important work within Cicansky's oeuvre. The dill pickle appears frequently in his later work.
- <sup>160</sup> Bruce W. Ferguson, "Victor Cicansky: The Garden as Vessel," in *Victor Cicansky: Clay Sculpture*, by Bruce W. Ferguson and Carol A. Phillips (Regina: Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, 1983), 17.
- <sup>161</sup> Ferguson, "Victor Cicansky," 17.
- <sup>162</sup> Carol A. Phillips, "Cicansky's Imagery: A Personal Note," in *Victor Cicansky: Clay Sculpture* (Regina: Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, 1983), 27.



- <sup>163</sup> “Germantown,” Regina: The Early Years, City of Regina. <http://scaa.usask.ca/gallery/regina/east/germantown.html>, accessed April 1, 2019.
- <sup>164</sup> Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 84.
- <sup>165</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>166</sup> The literal connection to Cicansky’s 1975 *Pigeon Fancier* was also not lost on me but the formal similarities to and subversive pairing with the outhouse series was uncanny and makes for a much stronger association.
- <sup>167</sup> “Perfume burner in the form of a dove-cote,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/205429>, accessed April 1, 2019.
- <sup>168</sup> Carl Christain Dauterman, “Pair of Perfume and Pot-Pourri Vases,” *The Wrightsman Collection*, vol. IV Porcelain (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970), 354.
- <sup>169</sup> If current asking prices can be used as an indication of an object’s rarity and prestige, New York’s Seidenberg Antiques’s asking price of \$80,000 for one of these dovecote Chelsea perfume burners says a lot. “Chelsea Model of a Dovecote as a Perfume Burner,” Seidenberg Antiques, <https://www.seidenbergantiques.com/chelsea-model-of-a-dovecote-as-a-perfume-burner-circa-1758.html>, accessed April 1, 2019.
- <sup>170</sup> Qtd. in Catherine Beth Lippert, *Eighteenth-Century English Porcelain in the Collection of the Indianapolis Museum of Art* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1987), 80.
- <sup>171</sup> Victor Cicansky to Diana Nemiroff, October 3, 1997.
- <sup>172</sup> “Trafalgar Fountain,” Wascana Centre, <http://wascana.ca/things-to-see-and-do/monuments-and-memorials/trafalgar-fountain>, accessed April 1, 2019.
- <sup>173</sup> Naomi Miller, “Fountain,” *Grove Art Online*, 2014, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com>, accessed April 1, 2019.
- <sup>174</sup> Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 146.
- <sup>175</sup> George Nakashima, *The Soul of a Tree: A Woodworker’s Reflections* (New York: Kodansha, 1981), 112–113.
- <sup>176</sup> Victor Cicansky, “Regina Tables and their Contents,” artist statement, June 2003, Victor Cicansky Papers, private collection.
- <sup>177</sup> To view this image visit SFMOMA Collection, <https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/72.38.A-CC/>.
- <sup>178</sup> M. Wayne Cunningham to Victor Cicansky, May 15, 1986, Victor Cicansky Papers, private collection.
- <sup>179</sup> To view an image of this work, visit Wascana Centre, “Burmese,” <http://wascana.ca/things-to-see-and-do/monuments-and-memorials/burmese>.
- <sup>180</sup> Judith Miller, “Furniture,” in *Decorative Arts: Style and Design from Classical to Contemporary* (London: Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2006), 380.
- <sup>181</sup> Ibid, 379.
- <sup>182</sup> Glenn Adamson, “Undertaker: Gord Peteran and the Black Art of Furniture Making,” in *Gord Peteran: Furniture Meets its Maker*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum, 2007), 20–21.
- <sup>183</sup> To view an image of this work, visit Brian Gladwell website, [https://briangladwell.com/artwork/870517\\_Console\\_Table\\_with\\_Drawers.html](https://briangladwell.com/artwork/870517_Console_Table_with_Drawers.html).
- <sup>184</sup> George Moppett, *Brian Gladwell: Twelve Works* (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1993).
- <sup>185</sup> Qtd. in Miller, “Furniture,” 380.
- <sup>186</sup> Sometimes it is necessary for Cicansky to build up the wood with wax. This is done for aesthetic and structural reasons but the original wood still remains a part of the positive object.
- <sup>187</sup> Over the course of many information discussions, Cicansky has mentioned this as the motivation behind his bonsai and table works.
- <sup>188</sup> In the summer of 2018, I was fortunate enough to accompany Cicansky while he gathered Hawthorn branches on the property of Don Thauberger near Kedleston, SK.
- <sup>189</sup> “Fleshy Hawthorn,” Virtual Herbarium of Plants at Risk in Saskatchewan: A Natural Heritage, Sask Herbarium, [http://www.usask.ca/biology/rareplants\\_sk/root/htm/en/plants-description/crataegus-succulenta/y-crataegus-succulenta.php](http://www.usask.ca/biology/rareplants_sk/root/htm/en/plants-description/crataegus-succulenta/y-crataegus-succulenta.php), accessed April 6, 2019.
- <sup>190</sup> Gerald W. R. Ward, “Substance and Structure: The Creative Use of Materials and Techniques by Artists in the Wornick Collection,” in *Shy Boy, She Devil, and Isis: The Art of Conceptual Craft*, eds. Gerald W. R. Ward and Julie M. Muñiz (Boston: MFA Publications, 2007), 27.
- <sup>191</sup> Victor Cicansky, “The Heart of the Garden,” artist statement, May 1997, Victor Cicansky Papers, private collection.
- <sup>192</sup> Victor Cicansky, “Near Muskeg,” artist statement, no date, Victor Cicansky Papers, private collection.
- <sup>193</sup> John Garrison, *Glass* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 20.
- <sup>194</sup> Qtd. in Garrison, *Glass*, 21.

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<sup>195</sup> Garrison, *Glass*, 21.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>197</sup> Qtd. in Koen Vanderstukken, *Glass: Virtual, Real* (London: Black Dog Publishing Limited, 2016), 61.

<sup>198</sup> See the discussion on the modern, vernacular use of the term “virtual” in Alan Goodrich, “Virtuality,” *The University of Chicago: Theories of Media: Keywords Glossary*, Winter 2002, <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/virtuality.htm>, accessed January 7, 2019.

<sup>199</sup> Jean Baudrillard, “A Model Material: Glass,” in *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1968), 41.

<sup>200</sup> It is significant to note that Cicansky’s ceramic preserves do not have the smooth glass-like exterior surface. The exclusive nature of glass with this specific object is no longer at play as one can pick up a preserve and literally feel its contents.

<sup>201</sup> Baudrillard, “A Model Material,” 42.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>203</sup> Jean Baudrillard, “Cultural Connation and Censorship,” in *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1968), 38.

<sup>204</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 73–75 and 86.

<sup>205</sup> Qtd. in Stewart, *On Longing*, 77.

<sup>206</sup> Cicansky, “University of Regina Lecture.”

<sup>207</sup> *February Pantry* was purchased in 2000 and *Dining on Peaches and Pears* was purchased in 2001. “Search the Collection: Victor Cicansky,” National Gallery of Canada, <https://www.gallery.ca/collection/search-the-collection>, accessed April 9, 2019.

## Chapter 2

### Potted Plants and Wallpaper: Victor Cicansky's Turn to the Domestic

“Finally, there is the matter of the viewer’s emotional response to the object. Reactions vary in kind, intensity, and specificity, but it is not uncommon to discover that what one considered a subjective response is in fact widely shared. A particular object may trigger joy, fright, awe, perturbation, revulsion, indifference, curiosity, or other responses that can be quite subtly distinguished. These subjective reactions, difficult but by no means impossible to articulate, tend to be significant to the extent that they are generally shared. They point the way to specific insights when the analyst identifies the elements noted in the descriptive stage that have precipitated them.”<sup>1</sup> – Jules David Prown

But

“One of the key problems in the study of material culture is the phenomenon of loss. Indeed, when it comes to the material past, disappearance is the norm, and preservation is the exception.”<sup>2</sup> – Glenn Adamson



**Figure 65** Victor Cicansky, *Wallpaper Flowers*, 1974. Clay, glaze, decals, 50.0 x 17.0 x 28.0 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

The *Wallpaper Flowers* (fig. 65) are a series of ceramic trompe l’oeil sculptures by Regina, Saskatchewan ceramist Victor Cicansky. Each “flower” is a piece of crumbling wallpapered wall planted in a terracotta pot. The wall has two sides: a stone or wood exterior side and an interior wallpapered side covered in patterns made of commercial ceramic decals. These are not new pieces of wall as they appear decayed and forgotten, peeling like dead skin on an arm during a dry, prairie winter. I have never found a physical example from the *Wallpaper Flowers* series.

beautiful	funny	sad
feminine	domestic	broken
fragmented	layered	hope
growth	deception	heavy
tired	haunted	decay
longing	smells like an old bookstore	absent
eclectic	forgotten	

For the past five years, I have been hunting, focused on locating the work of Saskatchewan ceramist Victor Cicansky in preparation for his retrospective exhibition *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener’s Universe* which opened at the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina, Saskatchewan on June 8, 2019 and was co-curated by myself and Head Curator at the MacKenzie, Timothy Long.<sup>3</sup> Yet even when pouring through documents, weaving my way through narrow pathways in antique stores, visiting the amazing homes of collectors, and navigating through the maze-like vaults at institutions, Cicansky’s *Wallpaper Flowers* series has eluded me, and their absence has haunted me at the same time. All too often absence goes unnoticed or is justified and accepted. Consequently, when conducting research for an exhibition and then curating it, absent objects are relegated to the margins or are not studied at all. Inspired by Glenn Adamson’s essay “The Case of the Missing Footstool” and Jules David Prown’s deductive approach to the study of objects (as partially demonstrated in the list of words above), this chapter will examine the absent *Wallpaper Flowers* series.<sup>4</sup> I will argue by thinking through and hypothesizing the contributing causes of the series’ absence, Cicansky’s “turn towards

the domestic” and his activities as a “hippie modernist” become increasingly important in understanding the political motivations behind his practice.

### Cicansky and the Great Funk



**Figure 66** Victor Cicansky, *Study for Self Portrait*, 1970. Earthenware, glaze, wood base, paint, 13.0 x 13.0 x 15.0 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



**Figure 67** Victor Cicansky, *Feeling Good Self Portrait*, 1970. Earthenware, glaze, wood base, paint, 14.0 x 11.5 x 10.0 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Home builder, gardener, artist, father, ceramist, provocateur, “hippie modernist,” and craftsperson Victor Cicansky was born in the mid 1930s in Regina. He began potting at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus in the mid 1960s when it was a prairie hotbed of modernist art with the Regina Five painters dominating the local art scene.<sup>5</sup> They were highly influenced by New York post-painterly abstraction and by critic Clement Greenberg (1909–1994) in particular.<sup>6</sup> This particular modernist aesthetic was fostered in Saskatchewan with the establishment of the Emma Lake Artists’ Workshops. The impetus for the workshops, spearheaded by Kenneth Lochhead (1926–2006) and Art McKay (1926–2000)—both teachers at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina

campus—was to combat the isolation of working in Saskatchewan by bringing prominent international artists to the province at the end of each summer session in order to lead workshops.<sup>7</sup> During the first 10 years of the workshop, the majority of the leaders, including Barnett Newman (1905–1970) in 1959, Clement Greenberg (1909–1994) in 1962, and Jules Olitski (1922–2007) in 1964, were associated with the New York non-figurative abstract art scene of the time. This strong association with a specific New York aesthetic led curator John O’Brian to state, “To put it bluntly, the aesthetics of Greenbergian formalism (I use the term in its broad, generic sense) found fertile soil in Saskatchewan.”<sup>8</sup> Large non-representational paintings were favoured, pushing the study of colour, design, and geometric planes to a massive, transcendental abstract scale, which in some ways affectively relates to the prairie itself. As explored in the previous chapter, as an undergraduate student, Cicansky was inspired by abstract expressionist ceramist Peter Voulkos (1924–2002) who violently attacked the material and conventions of the discipline itself.<sup>9</sup>



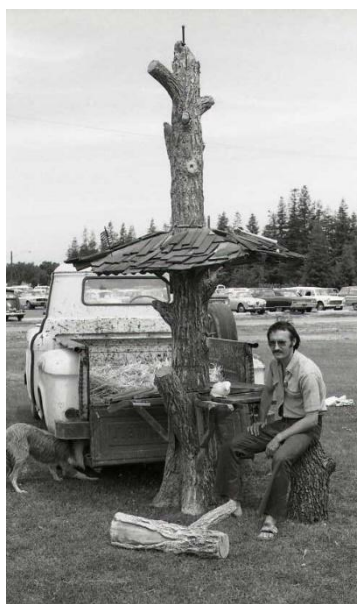
**Figure 68** Victor Cicansky, *Welcome*, 1970. Earthenware, glaze, 43.0 x 61.0 x 1.0 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



**Figure 69** Victor Cicansky, *Interior Ruin*, 1969. Earthenware, glaze, 25.5 x 35.5 x 15.0 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Cicansky pursued graduate studies at the University of California, Davis in close proximity to the San Francisco counterculture hippie movement. While in California from 1969 to 1970, he studied under Robert Arneson, a notable anti-establishment character within the history of American ceramics who is also considered to be a “Nut”

and Funk artist.<sup>10</sup> During his studies under Arneson, Cicansky explored the sculptural potential of ceramics in a number of series including clothing (fig. 13), overstuffed chairs (figs. 66 & 67), welcome mats (fig. 68), miniature architectural dioramas (fig. 69), life-size performative ceramic furniture (figs. 19 & 70), and surrealistic dishware (fig. 71). The faculty members at UC Davis<sup>11</sup> along with the burgeoning environmental movement and related happenings such as the Whole Earth Festival and Picnic Day at the school, cultivated Cicansky's hippie modernism and respect for the environment.<sup>12</sup> Hippie modernism is a term coined by curator Andrew Blauvelt in the exhibition catalogue *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*. He argues the hippie modernist identity formed in the United States between 1964 and 1974 during a particularly creative moment in time which “brought into dramatic relief the limits of Western society's progress and geopolitical power.”<sup>13</sup> These west-coast hippies were not the drug-using dropouts stereotyped by the media but were spiritual, political, and technologically savvy as they used, for example, early computing technologies in their quest to circumvent conventions dominated by a modern industrial Eurocentric perspective.<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 70** Victor Cicansky, *The Last Picnic*, 1970. Solano Park, University of California, Davis, CA. Mixed media. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

The tail end of the hippie modernist moment was the year the *Wallpaper Flowers* series was made. Therefore, it is important to recall what the early 1970s would have been like for Cicansky, both when he was in the United States studying, and when he returned back to Canada in 1970 to teach at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina

campus. The American architecture and design critic Thomas Hine argues in *The Great Funk: Styles of the Shaggy, Sexy, Shameless 1970s* that the 1970s were “a terrible time to be alive. Cars were running out of gas. The country was running out of promise. A president was run out of office. And American troops were running out of Vietnam.”<sup>15</sup> To Hine, in the 1970s, the country had fallen into the “Great Funk”; funk is used here to describe a combination of the popular styles and activities of the decade along with the societal changes and woes that dominated the time. It is also important to note the 1967 *Funk* exhibition at U. C. Berkeley which contained not quite abstract but not quite figurative sculpture from the San Francisco Bay area; the aesthetic was a combination self parody, irreverent free association, brash juxtapositions, and dark satirical humour.<sup>16</sup> Canada was also targeted by the oil embargo of 1973 which resulted in recession, gas shortages, and energy-related angst throughout the country. University of Calgary history professor Nancy Janovick explains in her essay “Rural Countercultures,” this recession led some Canadians to seek back-to-the land, self-reliant lifestyles in order to navigate the economic turmoil.<sup>17</sup> Consider, how in the same year the *Wallpaper Flowers* were made, the Cicansky family tried living off the land while renovating an old schoolhouse.<sup>18</sup>

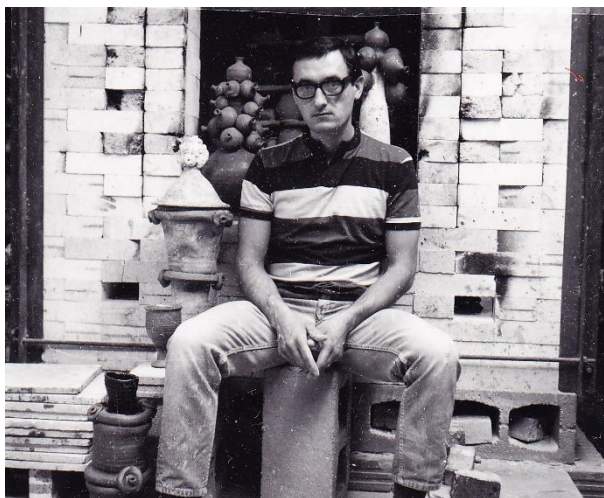


**Figure 71** Victor Cicansky, *Plate with Mouth*, 1970. Porcelain, glaze, 25.0 x 21.5 x 9.0 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Other significant events in the early 1970s which created a sense of unease and dystopia within the Canadian population were the October Crisis in 1970,<sup>19</sup> the 1972 murders at the Munich Olympics, and the 1973 Alert Bay Oil Spill,<sup>20</sup> to name just a few. However, like their American counterparts, Canadians were also participating in various actions related to the rise of identity politics which led to increased visibility and rights



for a number of communities. For example, in Canada in 1970, the Indian Association of Alberta, under the leadership of Harold Cardinal (1945–2005), published *Citizens Plus*—also known as the *Red Paper*—which rejected the Federal Government’s *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*—also known as the *White Paper*. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau (1919–2000) and Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chrétien, unveiled the *White Paper* in 1969 which “proposed ending the special legal relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian state and dismantling the Indian Act. This white paper was met with forceful opposition from Aboriginal leaders across the country and sparked a new era of Indigenous political organizing in Canada.”<sup>21</sup> A year after the *Red Paper*, in 1971, Trudeau announced multiculturalism as an official government policy,<sup>22</sup> The National Action Committee on the Status of Women was formed,<sup>23</sup> and *The Body Politic* (one of Canada’s first gay publications) was launched;<sup>24</sup> in 1972 Rosemary Brown (1930–2003), a social worker and active member of the nonpartisan organization Voice of Women, was the first Black woman to sit in the provincial BC government;<sup>25</sup> and in 1974 the first women were recruited to the RCMP<sup>26</sup> and human rights activist Mary Two-Axe Earley (1911–1996) attended the International Women’s Year conference in Mexico City where she highlighted the racist and gendered discrimination against Indigenous women in Canada including those who married non-status or non-indigenous men.<sup>27</sup> Individualism and the rights of minorities challenged the universal modernist white male “ideal” which was especially dominant during Cicansky’s undergraduate years.



**Figure 72** Victor Cicansky seated in front of a kiln filled with his pots at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus, c. 1967. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



**Figure 73** Victor Cicansky in a friend's backyard in Craven, Saskatchewan, 1974–75. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Cicansky was influenced by the paradigms espoused in both his undergraduate and graduate schools as demonstrated in two portraits: before (fig. 72) and after (fig. 73) California—from modernist to hippie modernist—from the 1960s to the 1970s. In addition, take note of the backgrounds in each portrait: the organized kiln filled with his modernist pots versus the backyard filled with debris and objects in various states of ruin and decay, tool and product (modern ideals of design) versus environment and material (hippie modernist ideals for living and the ruins of the decade).



**Figure 74** Victor Cicansky, *Rabbit Fancier*, 1974. Earthenware, commercial glaze, lustre, commercial decals, rhinestones, commercial beads, wire, plastic flowers, wood, acrylic paint, 39.5 x 40.7 x 39.5 cm. Collection: Private. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.



**Figure 75** Victor Cicansky, *Rabbit Fancier* (verso), 1974. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.



**Figure 76** Victor Cicansky, *Saskatchewan Potted Corn*, 1994. Clay, glaze, 63.0 x 25.0 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



**Figure 77** Victor Cicansky, *Tuesday Afternoon*, 1994. Earthenware, glaze, 17.8 x 29.2 x 20.3 cm. Collection: University of Lethbridge Art Collection; gift of the artist, 2000, 200.120. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

As mentioned, in 1974 Victor and his wife Fran both took leave of absences from their teaching jobs in order to try living self-sufficiently on their recently purchased piece of property in Craven, Saskatchewan, which included a 1917 brick schoolhouse.<sup>28</sup> The couple's year-long plan to live off the land involved growing the majority of their own food in a large garden, raising pigeons to eat, and renovating the schoolhouse. It is significant to note that while re-booting and re-fashioning an old schoolhouse into a domestic home and simultaneously living off the land so to speak, Cicansky continued to build miniature ceramic structures including house-like edifices in various states of ruin that were populated with the people in his life. For example, *Rabbit Fancier*, 1974 (figs. 74 & 75) was based on a man who raised rabbits in Balgonie, Saskatchewan. Life, politics, work, practice, and subject matter mixed together during this fruitful time in his practice. By the mid 1980s, while still living in Craven but having returned to teaching, the garden as subject became the major theme in his work with numerous series including ceramic potted plants such as cabbages and corn (fig. 76), armchairs with vegetables lounging on them (fig. 77), and preserves grouped together on pantry shelves (fig. 78). The 1980s also marked the addition of bronze into his repertoire which enabled him to cast garden-themed furniture (fig. 57) and plant-inspired sculptures such as bonsais (fig. 30). The garden theme, explored in both ceramic and bronze, continues in his work to this day while the ceramic clothing, architecture, and potted pieces of walls are no longer made.



**Figure 78** Victor Cicansky, *French Pantry Shelf*, 1981. Earthenware, glaze, lustre, wood, acrylic paint, 182.5 x 102.3 x 30.6 cm. Collection: Regina Public Library, PC83.1.7. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

### **Hunting, Curating, and the Absent Object**

The early stages of exhibition planning are my favourite as this is when the hunt begins. It is a hunt for objects, information, and images which will eventually inform and be used in the exhibition and subsequent publications. I always begin by pouring over the material that is readily available: exhibition catalogues, other relevant publications, and archival material. As I flip and sift through these pages from the past, I start a “hit list” which consists of the pieces I want to find as I think they might represent some of that person’s greatest hits. This list helps shape the theme and focus of the exhibition itself. I also contact key “informants” who share with me their favourite objects or tantalizing tidbits of information and sometimes even put me in direct contact with the owners of those objects. A key informant can be a collector, an expert of some kind (curator, scholar, etc), a colleague, or the artist. Once these first few steps are done, the hunt begins: sometimes I find those greatest hits and sometimes I don’t. For instance, during the early onset of this project, Cicansky communicated to Long and me that the ceramic fountain *Memories of California*, c. 1970 (fig. 29) was a very important piece and should be included in the exhibition. Although we were unable to locate it, *This is the fountain you’ve been looking for all your life complete with mosquito bites*, 1974 (figs. 33–36) was included in his retrospective and is, to me, a satisfactory stand in for the “lost” piece.<sup>29</sup> However, the objects on my hit list that I don’t find, like *Memories of California*, haunt me and continue to do so even after a project is over. I still long to find them. The nagging longing is due to a sense of failure on my part because these objects existed, and they were significant enough to make it into the printed record, but they are now absent from the physical record. In particular, in the case of retrospective exhibitions, these lost objects are absent from the puzzle I am trying to put together in order to present a cohesive exhibition and portrait of the artist. It is true enough an image of an absent object can be included in the catalogue or an equivalent can be located, but it is not the same as having the piece there to carefully study in person and for visitors to experience first hand. These absent pieces occupy the back of my mind, and a sense of longing surfaces whenever I walk through antique stores, visit the homes of collectors, or page

through upcoming auction catalogues in the hopes that one day, I will stumble upon one of them.

An exhibition is like a jigsaw puzzle made up of numerous pieces that fit together to create a cohesive whole. The box of an unopened jigsaw puzzle often indicates what the finished product will look like once the hundreds of puzzle pieces are spread out and subsequently assembled into that whole, just as the location, curators involved, title, and marketing material can inform the audience as to the theme and content of the exhibition even before visiting the show in person. One can also argue the museum as well as the theme or thesis are equivalent to the puzzle box. However, sometimes during the research phase of an exhibition, the metaphorical image on the jigsaw puzzle box is unknown, and it is up to the curator to research, locate, and assemble the pieces into a cohesive whole, to form the puzzle box so to speak. Other times, parts of the cohesive whole are established even before the research phase gets underway. For example, an exhibition could focus on figurative ceramics in present-day Saskatchewan, on the changing role of craft in the Catholic Church after Vatican II, or only on objects acquired for a permanent collection within the past year. In all cases, whether the theme is completely open or not, objects are approached and used to inform and illustrate the theme or thesis. For *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener's Universe*, Long and I decided after viewing over 1,000 pieces by the artist, the garden would serve as a unifying theme for the retrospective: the garden would be the metaphorical box. This topic continues to relate to his current politics and can be traced all the way back to his early years growing up in Regina as well as to his time at UC Davis. Consequently, the final 112 objects included in the exhibition complimented this garden-themed narrative.

Material culture professor Karen Harvey explains there are two ways to approach the study of objects: an object-driven and an object-centred approach.<sup>30</sup> An object-driven approach is one where objects are understood, through thick description, to be evidence of complex social relationships, and the emphasis is more on people and their lives. An object-centered approach tends to examine “technological development, typologies, and the aesthetic qualities of taste and fashion.”<sup>31</sup> These two approaches also describe how objects are used within an exhibition: they can be included as evidence of complex social relationships or as examples of some sort of development—aesthetic,

technological, etc. It is important to note an object can serve both roles; the roles are not mutually exclusive. In the case of the Cicansky exhibition, the ceramic boots (fig. 79) he made while at UC Davis were included in order to illustrate how his graduate school experiences, including his interpersonal relationships with fellow teachers and students, impacted his choice of subject matter and process. By contrast, the bronze *Pepper Shovel*, 1986 (fig. 50) was included in order to highlight a technological change within his work as it was one of the earliest bronze examples we were able to locate. However, with both approaches (object-driven and object-centered), the objects themselves are easily relegated to the role of illustration. They become evidence of something else such as a relationship or change in material, and consequently their meaning and ability to communicate nuanced associations is lost.



**Figure 79** Victor Cicansky, *Magritte's Shoe* (left) and *Clodhopper* (right), 1970. Porcelain, glaze, 15.2 x 6.4 x 20.3 cm and 13.8 x 23.3 x 8.5 cm. Collection: Fine Arts Collection, Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art University of California, Davis. Anonymous Donor. 85.MFA.70.3S and MacKenzie Art Gallery, 1995-10. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

As a researcher and curator, I attempt during all phases of the exhibition process to use a combination of both approaches which can be referred to as an “object-inspired approach” because it is the objects themselves that inspire, drive, and center the entire project.<sup>32</sup> It is often an object or a group of objects that inspire me to start a project as I want to learn more about them or their maker(s). During the research phase when the image on the metaphorical jigsaw puzzle box is unknown, it is the objects which help to inform the theme, the technological changes, and the social relationships that will be highlighted in the exhibition. When installing the exhibition, it is the proximity of objects

to one another which enables certain curatorial exclamation points to be made; this can only happen when one takes the time and is open to what the objects have to say and how they relate to one another.<sup>33</sup> Exhibition models, digital and analogue, work well during the initial phases of a project, but I advocate for an object-inspired approach where the curator, with the help of the installation team, takes the time when in the presence of the objects to become inspired, to constantly return to them, which might in turn impact the installation of the exhibition.

An object-inspired approach can also be used to critically and creatively engage with the exhibition. Art historian Jules David Prown's methodological approach to the study of objects is useful to an object-inspired approach as the objects themselves ground his three-step methodology: description, deduction, and speculation.<sup>34</sup> In particular, the deduction phase focuses on the relationship between the object and the perceiver as it facilitates a poetically affecting interaction between researcher and object. Prown states, "It involves the empathetic linking of the material (actual) or represented world of the object with the perceiver's world of existence and experience."<sup>35</sup> This step is by no means an objective study—which in itself is impossible—but it is a way to creatively and emotively relate to an object in a reasonable, common-sense way.<sup>36</sup> Deduction involves engaging on a sensory (what does it feel or smell like—both real and imagined), intellectual (how does it work or what does one see), and emotional (how does it make one feel) level with the object while also being aware of one's own reactions and how those reactions are shaped by other factors. Prown describes the fluidity and time-sensitive nature of this relationship between researcher and object when he states, "Just as the object is only what it is at the moment of investigation, and as such may be more or less different than what it was when it was made, so too the analyst is what he is at the moment of investigation...The particular encounter between an object with its history and an individual with his history shapes the deductions."<sup>37</sup> For me, this is a particularly exciting and powerful approach to objects which can lead to varied understandings and broader contexts, especially in the case of the absent *Wallpaper Flowers* series (fig. 65). According to Prown, by using such an affective approach, a different relationship is developed with the past.<sup>38</sup> It is a relationship that moves beyond the written historical record, to feelings and absent objects, and it is able to access other avenues of thought



which are often suppressed in favour of the fallacy of “objectivity.” The opening section of this chapter is a record of my sensory engagement with one particular *Wallpaper Flowers* in its represented form, a photograph. From my deductions and the series’ state of absence, I have come to think about Cicansky’s early work in a different way, expanding it from the narrow illustrative focus of the garden and its association to the environment, Funk, and folk which we presented in June 2019.



**Figure 80** All the *Wallpaper Flowers* images from Cicansky’s private archive. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

As stated, although Long and I were able to locate over 1,000 objects while conducting research for the Cicansky exhibition, I was unable to locate any examples from Cicansky’s 1974 *Wallpaper Flowers* series. Though 8 photographs of these ceramic trompe l’oeil chunks of wallpapered walls, planted in handmade terra cotta pots, exist in his archive (fig. 80) and a photocopy of page 4 from the July/August issue of *Tactile* magazine with two *Wallpaper Flowers* reproduced on the page was found in the Cicansky fonds at the University of Regina, Archives and Special Collections, no actual *Wallpaper Flowers* were located for the exhibition.<sup>39</sup> During our numerous curatorial meetings where we were trying to put together the exhibition jigsaw puzzle, Long and I discussed the absent *Wallpaper Flowers* series in relation to the 27 other potted plants we had located. These pieces, such as *Cabbage with Hailstones*, 1982 (fig. 81) and *Saskatchewan Potted Corn*, 1994 (fig. 76), were all made after the *Wallpaper Flowers*, and we deduced that the missing pieces signal the beginnings of the “potted plant as

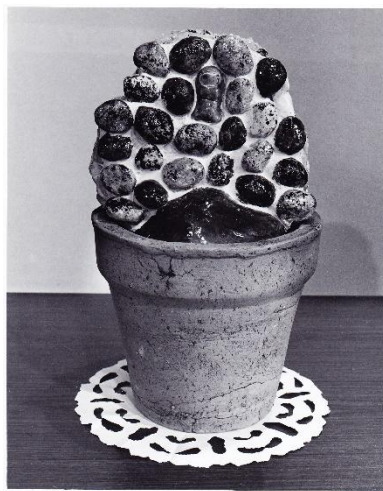
sculpture” for Cicansky; they are nascent so to speak. Building upon this deduction, Long and I concluded the later pieces were more representative of his work, and as a whole were further resolved than the earlier nascent ruins of wallpapered walls. The later work made clearer sense as puzzle pieces which fit into the garden theme. In summary, part of my curatorial process involved justifying the absence of *Wallpaper Flowers* (proto/nascent, not fully resolved, and full of clichéd one-line trompe l’oeil humour) and then accepting their absence. But strangely enough, the *Wallpaper Flowers* won’t leave me alone. I keep thinking about them, those strange objects with ceramic wallpaper on one side, peeling like dead skin on an arm during a dry prairie winter.



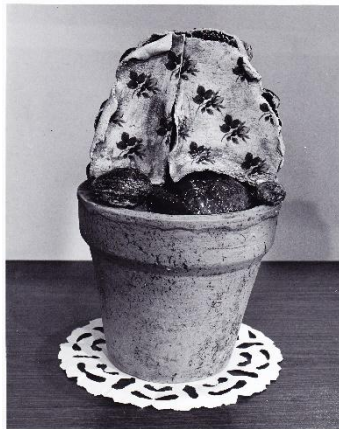
**Figure 81** Victor Cicansky, *Cabbage with Hailstones*, 1982. Terracotta, earthenware, commercial glaze, 55.9 x 50.8 x 50.8 cm. Collection: University of Lethbridge Art Collection; purchase 1982, 1982.29. Photo: Don Hall, MacKenzie Art Gallery. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

There was one glimmer of hope late in the hunt when an example of a *Wallpaper Flowers* that was not included in Cicansky’s archive was found in the past auction records of Waddington’s in Toronto, Ontario.<sup>40</sup> The auction house was kind enough to reach out to the person who purchased it, but there was no reply—a dead end. Therefore, the series continues to remain absent in the physical sense. However, the photographs of Waddington’s example provided tantalizing information about the series as until that point, I thought the field stone wall found in Cicansky’s archive (fig. 82) was a stand-alone object. From only looking at the photographs of the *Wallpaper Flowers* in Cicansky’s archive, I had presumed the opposite side of each wallpapered wall was either blank or wallpapered as well. Therefore, in addition to wallpapered walls, I presumed Cicansky had also planted chunks of field stone walls (fig. 82). In a way, information

about the back side of each wall was absent, and in that absence, I simply presumed something, that it was blank or the same as the front. However, the Waddington's auction page provided photographs of both sides of the wall: one decayed interior side (the front) and one exterior wood siding side with two rocks (the back). It turns out, these planted pieces of what appears to be a domestic wall have a front and back, an inside and outside or a papered and non-papered side, and are conceptually more complicated than I originally thought. With this notion of an inside and outside to each piece of wall, I now believe the photograph of the piece of fieldstone wall is the verso view of one of the other pieces of wallpapered walls (figs. 83 or 84 are good possibilities). As art historian Gill Perry notes in *Playing at Home: The House in Contemporary Art*, "The house is a discursive arena in which inside and outside spaces hold specific social and cultural associations that can be subverted through artistic representation. Doors and windows usually signify thresholds that separate intimate, sheltered space from the outside."<sup>41</sup> So do walls, and although Cicansky's ruined walls no longer have the ability to contain space, they still represent an inside and outside and therefore reference the home and recall a sense of boundary. The planted walls also combine past, present, and future into one object: a piece of the past is planted in the 1974 present in the hopes it will grow into something in the future. This looking back in time and the troubling of the stable "home" in relation to its occupants' identities were prevalent in the 1970s as economic petroleum-based turmoil and identity politics upended these certainties.



**Figure 82** Victor Cicansky, *Wallpaper Flowers*, c. 1974. Ceramic. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



**Figure 83** Victor Cicansky, *Wallpaper Flowers*, c. 1974. Ceramic. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



**Figure 84** Victor Cicansky, *Wallpaper Flowers*, c. 1974. Ceramic. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

From this conceptual revelation and the connection to the home, I have come to believe the *Wallpaper Flowers* are hauntingly telling me to take note of their absence and to use it productively. Glenn Adamson writes in “The Case of the Missing Footstool: Reading the Absent Object,” that within the study of material culture, disappearance is the norm and preservation is the exception.<sup>42</sup> These uneven rates of survival create a false picture of the past as class, gender, geography, and ethnic identity can all play a part in what is preserved and what is not. He hypothesizes several reasons why there are no examples of 18<sup>th</sup> century British domestic footstools yet a possible example appears in Hogarth’s painting *Marriage A-la-Mode* in the bottom right corner. The footstool’s presence in a painting yet absence in form is much like the collection of photographs of *Wallpaper Flowers*, found in the two-dimensional record but not in the three-dimensional one. Adamson asks: “what if absence in the historical record were to be treated not as a

problem to overcome, but rather as a matter of historical interest in its own right?”<sup>43</sup> Adamson’s question has provoked me to think about my curatorial process.

In curating the retrospective, we started with a void in the historical record, which was “Cicansky the artist,” and it is important to note this identification of a void in the historical record was one of the justifications for the exhibition. We felt there was a need to find out who he is and was; what he is doing and has done; and who he has impacted over the course of his five-plus-decades-long career. As we located those somewhat rare preserved objects and inserted them into the void—like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle—the edges of the void shifted and changed and started to form a clearer picture of Cicansky the artist; they started to articulate that metaphorical jigsaw puzzle box. But those edges are shaped by the known and preserved objects which reflect, by the very fact they are preserved, a variety of biases. In thinking about the missing *Wallpaper Flowers*, I have come to consider how productive it might be to metaphorically “wallpaper” the edges of the void with absence, gleaning inspiration from the absent object itself. What if I don’t accept the *Wallpaper Flowers* series’ absence as justification for not including it in the retrospective and ponder a number of questions instead: Why did he make them? Why did he stop making them? Why were no examples from this series ever acquired by an institution? Why the absence? What else can we learn from the state of absence? Thinking more broadly, absence is, after all, a significant condition within craft. Acknowledging, identifying and even embracing it rather than accepting, justifying, and then moving on, might very well prove to be rather fruitful in troubling the edges of those historic voids and experimenting with new approaches to research and curating.

After wallpapering the void with absence and pondering a number of the questions listed above, I have come to the conclusion one of the contributing factors to the physical absence of these pieces is the fact that Cicansky’s work, starting in the late 1960s and continuing on through the 1970s, saw a “turn to the domestic.” This turn coincided with the rise of a neo-Victorian aesthetic in North America’s domestic interiors characterized by ornate wallpaper and potted plants, the social upheaval of the decade, and with Cicansky’s development and solidification as a hippie modernist. Remember, this was when he moved to Craven to live off the land while renovating an old schoolhouse and creating art out of that very house, including the *Wallpaper Flowers*.

While other domestic objects by Cicansky have made it into collections, the wallpaper and potted plant as subject might be too overtly domestic, and their associations with a type of kitschy interior found both in the 1970s and the Victorian period is not as easily co-opted by other narratives such as the machismo activities of the funk ceramists or the environmental politics of Cicansky.

In the following pages, I will consider and contextualize the *Wallpaper Flowers* series with absence and domesticity in mind through a number of case studies inspired by the words listed at the outset of this chapter. I have come to this point thanks to the series' persistent haunting and to the emotional responses I recorded while closely looking at a photograph of a *Wallpaper Flowers*. Through this object-inspired deductive process, I realize that during the research phase of Cicansky's retrospective exhibition and the writing of another Cicansky-focused chapter for my dissertation, I was willfully blind to the rich topic of domesticity as I have, up until this point, contextualized his domestic objects—clothes, bags, chairs and even his preserves—within Cicansky's more public pursuits such as his education, gardening, interest in labour and materials, and environmental actions. I too have dismissed the domestic in favour of other more dominant modes of interpretation, but through the process of engaging with absence, new avenues of research have emerged, leading to alternative frames of reference for his early work in particular.

### **Case Study: Domestic**

In *Playing at Home: The House in Contemporary Art*, art historian Gill Perry defines a “turn to the domestic,” as “an engagement with the activities, spaces, materials and tropes of the ‘home’.”<sup>44</sup> This turn was especially evident in Cicansky's work while at UC Davis and then throughout the 1970s, for example in his *Welcome* door mat (fig. 68) and overstuffed chairs (figs. 19, 66 & 67). Sophie Bowlby, Susan Gregory, and Linda McKie point out in “‘Doing Home’: Patriarchy, Caring and Space,” that in terms of “white, western ideology,” “The notion of the home as a physical location and a psychological concept is often a positive one of warmth, security, and a haven from the pressures of paid employment and public life.... However, the home is also a site for the creation and operation of inequitable relations that can be expressed in psychological tension and

violence.”<sup>45</sup> A piece of broken wall as seen in the *Wallpaper Flowers* series, planted in a terracotta pot, oozes with psychological tension. Here we see the remnants of comforting domestic patterns from times past shattered into pieces exacerbated through the attention paid to the jagged edges of a wall meant to keep one secure from the outside world. The form of the wall brings to mind the shape of the succulent pads of the Plains Prickly Pear Cactus (*Opuntia polyacantha*) which in itself advances the tension. Unlike the furry leaves of the African Violet (*Saintpaulia*) which beg to be caressed, the formal reference to the cacti suggests distance and pain. The *Wallpaper Flowers* do not appear to come from happy homes where all is well. However, because the wall is sown like a domestic plant, the psychological tension is grounded in the notion that it can all lead to new growth. These points are what makes this series so compelling in relation to the domestic.



**Figure 85** Victor Cicansky, *Assorted Preserves*, 1980. Earthenware, glaze, lustre, various Mason jar sizes. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

In the “Introduction” to *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, art historian Christopher Reed—while drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin (1892–1940)—points out that in the 1800s a distinction was made between living spaces and spaces for work which in turn aligned the concept of “domesticity” and the home with a “separation from the workplace, privacy, comfort, [and] focus on the family.”<sup>46</sup> Since the Victorian times, the domestic or domesticity has been associated with family, women, and feminine taste. As design historian Penny Sparke explains in *As Long as It’s Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste*, with the separation of life into the private home and public spheres, women became responsible for the moral framework within the domestic realm, and this was accomplished through the beautification of the interior: “The ‘good’ was also the ‘beautiful,’ and woman, the embodiment of beauty, was also the personification of morality, responsible for the moral

dimension of family life.”<sup>47</sup> Throughout her book, Sparke advocates for an in-depth examination of the life-cycle of domestic objects (such as potted plants and wallpaper), which includes their selection, purchase, and arrangement within the Victorian home. She writes: “Through the exercise of their tastes, women have selected objects and arranged them in their domestic settings and, in doing so, have both formed and reinforced their own gender identities.”<sup>48</sup> By focusing on these particular moments within an object’s life, feminine taste, its specific communicative potential, and how it operates outside of the value judgements imposed by masculine culture can be examined. However, Sparke points out feminine taste and its complex relationship to objects has more often than not been ignored and denigrated in favour of production and its association with masculine taste and public life: “the objects of feminine taste have, in this century [the 20<sup>th</sup> century], frequently been deemed inferior to those of high culture. The material culture of feminine domesticity—expressed by such repeatedly vulgar items as coal-effect fires, chintz fabrics, and potted plants—has frequently been singled out for condemnations or, at best, sarcasm, and dismissed as kitsch.”<sup>49</sup> With the combination of potted plant and chintz-like wallpaper, I too dismissed the *Wallpaper Flowers* and accepted their absence. As I reflect on my curatorial choices, I have come to believe it was easier for me to accept a potted plant like *Cabbage with Hailstones* (fig. 81) as being “more refined” and less “kitsch” because it wasn’t a *gendered* plant oozing the feminine/domestic taste like the *Wallpaper Flowers*.



**Figure 86** Victor Cicansky, *Zippered Bag*, 1968. Stoneware, fibreglass, oxides, 33.0 x 25.5 x 10.0 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.



Reed astutely points out how modern avant-garde writers, artists, and architects continued the denigration of feminine taste by attacking the domestic and the decorating activities of women. Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) in the 1850s cursed the time he spent indoors as he wanted to record life in the city.<sup>50</sup> In 1923, Le Corbusier (1887–1965) advocated a house should be a machine for living, as the old-fashioned houses designed by architects trained in schools like “hot-houses where blue hortensias and green chrysanthemums are forced, and where unclean orchids are cultivated”<sup>51</sup> were a detriment to one’s health and morale. Post-war painters such as Adolph Gottlieb (1903–1974) and Mark Rothko (1903–1970) in a 1943 letter published in *The New York Times* reacted against intimacy in the domestic sphere by advocating for the creation of huge paintings that “must insult anyone who is spiritually attuned to interior decoration; pictures for the home; pictures for over the mantle.”<sup>52</sup> Clement Greenberg (an influential figure to the modernist painters in Saskatchewan) described decoration in 1957 as “the specter that haunts modernist painting.”<sup>53</sup> Reed states: “This has been the standard of modern art: a heroic odyssey on the high seas of consciousness, with no time to spare for the mundane details of home life and house keeping.”<sup>54</sup> This mindset has, in turn, impacted the types of objects made by artists and craftspeople and collected by private individuals and institutions.

Yet in the late 1960s, Cicansky took a turn towards the domestic, finding the time to explore and elevate the “mundane” details of home life and house keeping: consider the pile of folded clothes (fig. 21), ceramic preserves (fig. 85), and *Wallpaper Flowers* (fig. 65). Even before attending UC Davis where he made closets full of clothes and overstuffed armchairs, at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus with teachers such as the modernist painter Art McKay (1926–2000), Cicansky began to shift towards the domestic with his research and fabrication of ceramic leather bags such as *Zippered Bag*, 1968 (fig. 86). It is important to note his research involved observing Fran sewing shirts within the productive home as well as Victor’s subsequent deconstructing and reconstructing one of her leather bags.<sup>55</sup> Cicansky states, “I got hooked on clay. But not functional pottery. I had a sense that clay as a sculptural medium had the potential to express bigger ideas. The history of clay cultures worldwide is a rich source of images that reflect human experience. I set out to explore other ways of working with clay as a

medium of expression.”<sup>56</sup> For Cicansky, this involved adding fibreglass to a clay body in order to make it more textile-like, a technique he had learned during a workshop with Ricardo Gómez at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus.<sup>57</sup> Techniques such as these facilitated a shift, as instead of continuing to make heroic pots destined for the art gallery rather than the kitchen, Cicansky made visible and permanent (as ceramic is an unrecyclable material) the “hidden life” and activities he observed Fran undertaking within the domestic sphere by “sewing” clay into domestic objects.<sup>58</sup> Throughout his career, Cicansky has readily adopted the position of provocateur and what better way to provoke the modern painters at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus than to take a turn towards the domestic.

Cicansky’s imitation of the mode of production or his *remediation of content*, a concept articulated by craft historian Amy Gogarty in “Remediating Craft,” was out of respect and served to make visible the labour he had observed around him in his day-to-day life in both his past and present circumstances.<sup>59</sup> Frances Borzello notes in *At Home: The Domestic Interior in Art* the domestic interior as subject has been invisible to the history of art and has had “no official existence.”<sup>60</sup> While her book focuses on renditions of domestic interiors in paintings, Cicansky’s turn to the domestic makes visible invisible gendered labour within the productive home—sewing (fig. 86), laundry (fig. 22), the folding of clothes (fig. 21), wallpapering (fig. 65), and canning (fig. 85). As a hippie modernist, this visibility is meant to trouble the conventions of gender, homelife, and the art world.

Like Perry who connects the domestic to the home, Bowlby, Gregory, and McKie argue the definition of home not only encompasses the physical structure but also the activities that take place within it.<sup>61</sup> Art historian Rozsika Parker astutely points out in *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*:

The art/craft hierarchy suggests that art made with thread and art made with paint are intrinsically unequal: that the former is artistically less significant. But the real differences between the two are in terms of *where* they are made and *who* makes them. Embroidery, by the time of the art/craft divide, was made in the domestic sphere, usually by women, for ‘love.’ Painting was produced predominantly, though not only, by men, in the public sphere, for money.<sup>62</sup>

Although the sewing activities Victor observed in the home were not embroidery, his close study of Fran's sewing did take place in the home. Cicansky also troubles the art/craft and gender divide as his domestic objects, inspired by Fran's labour within the home, are made of clay rather than being paintings—they are craft, not art. In addition, his ceramic sculptures contrast the heroic abstract expressionist work of makers such as Peter Voulkos (1924–2002).



**Figure 87** Victor Cicansky, *Big Mason Pickled Potatoes*, 1981. Earthenware, glaze, lustre, 42.0 x 22.0 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

As hippie modernists experimenting with living off the land, Fran and Victor's move to Craven and the subsequent creation of his ceramic preserves (fig. 85) are significant in terms of his turn towards the domestic and its association with female labour. Literature professor and poet Alison Calder asks in "Victor Cicansky's Post-Prairie Imaginings":

While [Robert] Kroetsch and his literary circle functioned in and reproduced a largely masculine sphere, Cicansky's works, particularly his jars and pantries, represent what has traditionally been women's work... These jars celebrate survival, at the same time that, as art, they are themselves 'useless' objects: leisure replaces labour. Is this romanticized nostalgia or documentary record? Is Cicansky displacing women's labour with his own? Is the labour of the working class now transformed into objects consumed by the rich? Exactly what is being preserved here?<sup>63</sup>

In his memoir, Cicansky recalls how the idea for his ceramic preserves came about:

I first appreciated the gem-like beauty of preserve jars as a young boy when I watched Bunica [his grandmother] and my mom working to fill them. The image of jars of preserves impressed itself on my young imagination. Many years later, when we were living and gardening in Craven, I remember my wife, Fran, busily preserving the bounty from our Craven garden. My imagination was reignited by her beautiful preserves: jars of sliced beets, carrots, cucumber pickles, tomatoes, jars of giardiniera, tri-colour bush beans, and salsas. I picked up a jar quart of mixed pickles, held it up and said, “This is beautiful. I should make something like this in clay.” Fran responded, “Why don’t you!”<sup>64</sup>

He also remembers helping with the process as a child: “I loved fermented cucumber pickles best and I even helped with pickling. First, we’d stuff a handful of fresh dill with flower heads into half gallon jars. Next came the cucumbers, fresh pieces of horseradish along with horseradish leaves, four or five cloves of garlic, bay leaves, a small red-hot pepper, and several whole black peppercorns.”<sup>65</sup> Cicansky’s first ceramic mixed pickles were made in the exact same fashion he had observed: he first made several pickles out of clay and then stuffed them into a plaster mold of a mason jar (the equivalent of the empty glass jar). Another excellent example of this process is *Big Mason Pickled Potatoes*, 1981 (fig. 87) where the undercuts and flattened surfaces of the potatoes indicate that each potato was made separately and then pressed into a mould. Needless to say, this was a very time-consuming approach, and as the demand for his ceramic jars grew, he eventually modified his process to slipcasting (fig. 88) and abandoned the invisible pickling labour and methods he had observed his grandmother, mother, and wife undertake within the productive home. Even though his methodological approach changed, the ceramic preserves he makes today continue to elevate and celebrate what modernists dismissed as mundane house keeping associated with home life. Cicansky is not so much displacing women’s labour with his own but rebooting, remixing, and firing it into a visible, holy relic-like object.<sup>66</sup>

Blauvelt argues hippie modernists, who were inspired by their interpretation of 19<sup>th</sup> century agrarian life and whose fashion tastes involved a mashup aesthetic of pioneer dress and Victorian flair, wanted to recapture, relocate, and reboot the past.<sup>67</sup> Sparke explains that in the pre-industrial 18<sup>th</sup> century, before the split between public work life and private domestic life, the home was a place of both production and consumption: “The household had been the locus of work and the family’s residence. In the urban

setting and on the farm, the married couple had often worked together, and while there had been, as elsewhere, a clearly defined sexual division of labour, women had also played an important productive role in such activities as spinning, sewing, lace-making, and straw plaiting.”<sup>68</sup> With Fran and Victor’s move to Craven, the household was once again the locus of work and family residence as Victor had a studio within the home. While renovating the schoolhouse, he created the *Wallpaper Flowers* series, and then later when the garden was well established, he “canned” his first pickles.



**Figure 88** Victor Cicansky, *Assortment of Jars*, 2010. Earthenware, glaze, lustre, various sizes. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Cicansky’s turn coincided with, as Reed and Sharon Haar point out in “Coming Home: A Postscript on Postmodernism,” postmodernism’s “home-coming...as artists and designers have (re)turned their attention to the domestic.”<sup>69</sup> This was especially true with *Woman House*, a 1972 feminist project within an empty California mansion which involved numerous installations and performances by women artists including Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro (1923–2015) and Faith Wilding.<sup>70</sup> Perry notes how in 1980 with pieces such as *Instant House*, American artist Vito Acconci (1940–2017) “appropriated both the idea of the home, and its recognizable architectural forms...as potent metaphors for the explosion of cultural myths of domesticity, privacy and political ideologies.”<sup>71</sup> Although *Woman House* existed outside the gallery space precisely because women at the time did not feel welcome within it, as the century continued and the domestic proved to be a fruitful theme, others such as Young British Artist Michael Landy have built literal homes within the gallery. Complicating the gendered associations

of the domestic and gallery space, Landy's *Semi-detached*, 2004, a literal recreation of his family home, was installed at Tate Britain in 2004 and focused on his father who was incapacitated in an industrial accident and spent a lot of time at home.<sup>72</sup> The domestic has been used to explore other potent themes such as memory and cultural displacement. Young British Artist, Rachel Whiteread's installation *Place (Village)*, 2006–2008 made up of approximately 150 empty dolls' houses,<sup>73</sup> and Canadian Graeme Patterson's exhibition *Woodrow*, a re-creation of his grandfather's hometown of Woodrow, Saskatchewan with stop-motion animated film clips playing within the structures,<sup>74</sup> both poetically combine haunting memories in other-worldly miniature domestic settings. Falling homes in various states of ruin are explored in the work of Korean artist Do-Ho Suh. In *Fallen Star 1/5*, 2008, Suh recreated his Korean childhood home as a 1:5 scale model crashing into the side of a scale model of the apartment block he was living in at the time in Providence, Rhode Island, a pointed depiction of what Perry describes as "a disturbing cultural experience of uprooting and moving to the U.S."<sup>75</sup> The point of including these examples is to demonstrate how domesticity and the home are now very much a part of art world discourse. However, while it might be tempting to think about the *Wallpaper Flower* series in light of contemporary issues surrounding the home and the domestic, *Wallpaper Flowers* does not productively respond to questions of displacement, migration, and the nostalgic yearnings that come with increased globalization that contemporary artists such as Suh do. The fractured home in *Wallpaper Flowers* is a response to the changes in home decorating, the increased visibility of women's work within the home (thanks in part to projects such as *Woman House* and the increase in women's rights), and the social upheaval of the 1970s.

The *Wallpaper Flowers* series are keystone pieces in the puzzle of Cicansky's turn towards the domestic as they were created in a productive hippie modernist home. Their domestic subject matter, while not as subversive as the bags made at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus within the hotbed of masculine modernist art, were in tune with the art world's general turn toward the domestic and the rise of feminist art.

### Case Study: Forgotten

Although I have argued that collector and institutional bias has played a role in the absence of the *Wallpaper Flowers* series, a significant number of Cicansky's other domestically themed sculptures have also been forgotten. Take the *VC Ball Cap*, 1969 (fig. 17)—another example of his remediation of content—which only recently surfaced. There are no examples of his ceramic hats in any public institutions' collections.<sup>76</sup> According to Cicansky, it was originally purchased in c. 1969 by Allan Stone, a New York City art dealer and collector, when he visited Cicansky's Davis studio and purchased almost everything in it.<sup>77</sup> During its time with Allan Stone, it was not included in any major exhibitions, was not reproduced in any gallery-related publications, and therefore was absent and forgotten from the contemporary understanding of Cicansky and his work.

Then, the cap was put up for auction by Rago Arts on October 18, 2016 with an estimate of \$800 to \$1,200, and it did not sell. Perhaps there is no place for it in the puzzle? Too expensive? It was then put up again for auction in an unreserved session on April 8, 2017 and sold for \$51 to Otto Binx, a New York fine art and design dealer; note that it was someone associated with domestic interiors who finally purchased the piece. Binx posted the cap for sale on his website for four times the price he had paid at auction which was comparable to Cicansky's contemporary market value. Nevertheless, the cap didn't sell and didn't sell—forgotten in Binx's inventory—until Binx discounted it for \$150, half the price of Cicansky's contemporary ceramic pints. At that point, a private collector bought it because “it was a really good deal and I couldn't pass it up.”<sup>78</sup>

I have included the asking prices here to prove a point about the value of this work to the collector market. It was not a lot of money but still did not catch the eye of any institution or collector, sold eventually to a dealer who provides domestic decoration services, and was only purchased by a collector once it was “a good deal.” Cicansky's more contemporary work regularly sells at auction, he is well represented by Canadian commercial galleries, and his work is held in numerous public collections across the country. Therefore, it is surprising that an object from his time at Davis (and objects from the Davis period are not well represented in Canadian galleries) did not sell immediately, especially at such discounted prices. I attribute this lack of action to a bias against the

domestic.<sup>79</sup> Although *VC Ball Cap* was eventually purchased by a Saskatchewan collector and subsequently included in the retrospective exhibition, its inclusion was due to the way it illustrated Cicansky's time at Davis, his interest in process and labour, and related to the large overstuffed chair (fig. 19), the focal point piece representing his formative years at Davis. While trying to fill the voids during the curatorial and research phase of Cicansky's retrospective, I did not think about the hat in terms of a turn to the domestic, but in light of its absence and forgotten state the hat's provenance is telling.

Another example of a forgotten piece which was quite contentious during the object selection phase of the exhibition is *Pile of Shirts*, 1969 (fig. 21). Unlike *VC Ball Cap*, which did appear in Cicansky's private archival photographs, *Pile of Shirts* was not in his archive and had not been reproduced in any publication—it was forgotten. According to informal discussions with a number of individuals, *Pile of Shirts* was acquired by ceramist David Gilhooly (1943–2013) in a trade.<sup>80</sup> He then donated it, along with a number of other pieces, to Nickle Galleries at the University of Calgary.<sup>81</sup> In addition to this initial donation, Gilhooly proposed annual donations to “The Gilhooly Collection” of approximately six objects valued around \$2,000 and “an annual sum of money to start at about \$500 in 1980 and increasing as I am financially able. This would be for curatorial costs of maintaining The “Gilhooly Collection.”<sup>82</sup> Considering the bias against the domestic, I suspect *Pile of Shirts* would not have made it into a collection on its own but only did so because it was part of a group with future monetary and object donations attached to it. Long and I had several debates about this work. At the time, I felt it illustrated Cicansky's engagement with the fold and theories surrounding textiles but did not quite fit with the other Davis objects we had selected.<sup>83</sup> Long felt it was an odd ball piece that didn't really point or relate to our larger themes. In the end, we included it as a contrast to the chaos in *Abandoned Gladstone*, 1969 (fig. 22). As part of the research I conducted for the chapter “Of Thread and Branches: Victor Cicansky's Crafted Path,” I asked Cicansky how *Pile of Shirts* was made in the hopes that it was another example of content remediation, but he could not confirm that he pieced together every shirt in the same manner that it would have been sewn together. He did, however, remember that each shirt was made individually, folded in a certain manner, and put into the pile, much like the process involved when folding laundry and preparing it for the



drawers—a very domestic act that he saw and did in his own home. In light of my own turn towards the domestic, the fold in *Pile of Shirts* is not only a philosophical binary troubling exercise but an act of making the invisible domestic act of folding clothes visible and permanent which in turn monumentalizes the perfectly folded shirts as a sculpture fit for the gallery.

### **Case Study: Layered Eclecticism**

Consider this sage and topical decorating advice from a 1975 edition of the *Globe and Mail*: “Today’s living is color, so don’t be afraid to use it. Wallpapers are wonderful for halls, kitchens and bathrooms and are most attractive when all walls are papered....When choosing your rugs, remember your heavy traffic areas. Shag is easy living and needs less maintenance than plush.”<sup>84</sup> While today, “shag” and “less maintenance” are not typically found within the same sentence, in the mid 1970s, shag was everywhere, and Phyllis Lyons Broudy’s advice immediately conjures up images of Graceland’s “Jungle Room” in Memphis, Tennessee (fig. 89). Elvis Presley’s den and occasional studio, which was built in 1965 but renovated in 1974, exudes the stereotypical 1970s love of colour, pattern, texture, and kitsch while serving as a useful but over-the-top visual cue for this aesthetic and its subsequent manifestations in the home.<sup>85</sup>



**Figure 89** Elvis Presley’s ‘The Jungle Room’ at Graceland. Photo by Egghead06, October 8, 2007. Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:GracelandJungleRoom.JPG>.

Elvis' extreme example is meant to illustrate with a bit of tongue-in-cheek humour how domestic interiors in the late 1960s and 1970s underwent some dramatic changes. These changes can be seen in two Canadian examples which are not as extreme as Elvis' overgrown man-cave. Associate professor George Thomas Kapelos explains in "The Small House in Print: Promoting the Modern Home to Post-War Canadians Through Pattern Books, Journals, and Magazines," that after the Second World War, there were severe housing shortages across Canada.<sup>86</sup> Kapelos contends through the popular and professional press—including *Canadian Homes and Gardens* magazine and promotional material from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation—Canadians were encouraged to adopt a modern architectural design aesthetic for their "small" single-family homes which grew from under one thousand square feet to around two thousand square feet. Of *Canadian Homes and Gardens* Kapelos states: "This publication, unique in English Canada during the period, established norms of acceptability for these houses, provided standards for their occupancy, and, most critically, promoted their comfort and liveability."<sup>87</sup> Therefore, *Canadian Homes*' (formerly *Canadian Homes and Gardens*) April 1961 illustrated feature, "They Put the Pool in the Front Yard," can serve as an example of the type of design aesthetic promoted by the Canadian press during the 1960s.<sup>88</sup> The article features the Powers family who commissioned their own home in Oakville, Ontario. The house is modern, new, open, and sparsely decorated, all stereotypical features of a mid-century modern home. The accompanying caption for the colour image of their family room reads: "While children play in the family room, George and Edna Powers relax upstairs by gilt-framed family portraits. They laid the floor tiles and painted the walls themselves."<sup>89</sup> In the popular press, this quote equates the importance and pride of home ownership with its relationship to do-it-yourself initiatives, the home as a place of origin and security, and as Bowlby, Gregory and McKie note, the "family relationships' made up of a heterosexual couple, married or cohabiting, with children or other relatives."<sup>90</sup>

Contrast the 1961 Powers' example with Lawrence Schafer's Toronto apartment and Joan Druxman's Winnipeg apartment, featured in the Spring 1974 and Winter 1976 issues of *Canadian Homes*.<sup>91</sup> Floors are now covered in layers of pattern and texture, walls are plastered with patterned wallpaper, and multiple pieces of art and plants abound

in the Druxman example. Although the Winnipeg interior is filled with light and plants, both domestic spaces feel closed in and dark as opposed to the Powers' open and spacious home. Generally speaking, the 1974–75 issues feature singles or small families living in small unconventional dwellings—floating homes, a rail car turned into a home, an 1824 stone house, and apartment living. There are also numerous articles on how you can remodel the old into the new. This focus on small homes and remodelling for families and singles reflects the economic upheaval and social changes of the decade. While a *Wallpaper Flowers* would feel out of place in the 1960s Powers home, it would fit right in the Schafer residence with its layered moody interior, and it would metaphorically grow right alongside Druxman's Edenic decor.

These changes in the domestic interior can be linked to changes within both American and Canadian society during the 1960s and 1970s. Hine explains the confident, uncluttered mid-century domestic interior transformed into a nest-like refuge filled with eclecticism, pattern, ornament, shag carpets, wallpaper, and potted plants which he argues “is most simply and accurately seen as a quest for comfort in a difficult and seemingly deteriorating world.”<sup>92</sup> Therefore, the zeitgeist of the times can be seen as a contributing factor to the dramatic differences between the domestic interiors featured in the popular press of the early 1960s where a universal modern aesthetic was promoted as the ideal fit for the Powers nuclear family home and the mid-1970s homes of single, career-driven individuals such as Schafer and Druxman who were possibly seeking comfort from the upheaval of the decade.

The social and economic upheavals of the 1970s also impacted the domestic interiors of the hippie modernists. As noted earlier, hippie modernists looked to the past—the 19<sup>th</sup> century in particular—as they wanted to recapture, relocate, and reboot historical trends, styles, and ways of life.<sup>93</sup> To put it simply, modernists wanted to constantly invent without referencing history. These two paradigms—the hippie modernist and the modernist—are echoed in exterior and interior home designs of the time. While the Powers' home does have some “historical” paintings on the wall, the furnishings include Scandinavian inspired, mid-century modern, teak-looking furniture in the basement and Miesian Barcelona-looking chairs in the living room.<sup>94</sup> Very little in this interior looks back in order to reboot the past for the present. This modernist impulse

to invent while cutting ties with history is taken to the extreme in Alison and Peter Smithson's 1956 design of the *House of the Future* for Britain's *Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition*.<sup>95</sup> The Smithson's concept of the future contained no hints of the past, no layering, and technology reigned supreme as the open-plan interior featured moulded plastic built-in furniture and technological gadgets designed to be updated and replaced every year.<sup>96</sup> This aesthetic is echoed in the Powers' home but is completely absent in the Schafer apartment. Schafer's eclectic interior layers, relocates, and juxtaposes a number of historical styles including Queen Anne winged back chairs, turn-of-the century shaped stained-glass lampshades, and the barely visible peacock feathers in the upper left corner of the image (an indispensable feature of any aesthetic interior of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century) with a futuristic coffee table and contemporary Pop Art. In addition, the caption points out Schafer's apartment features an "interesting piece of Victorian gingerbread attached to the ceiling [which] serves as a visual divider without taking up valuable floor space."<sup>97</sup> Past, present, and future are rebooted and remixed into something completely different in Schafer's apartment.



**Figure 90** Victor Cicansky's Craven home, a former schoolhouse, c. 1974–76. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Although it is not out of line to assume Schafer was not a hippie modernist, hippie modernism and various other political movements influenced the eclecticism of home interiors. During this period, a number of publications featured parallel forms of

architecture including the 1973 picture book *Handmade Houses: A Guide to the Woodbutcher's Art* by self-described woodbutcher Art Boericke and photographer Barry Shapiro.<sup>98</sup> Shapiro's beautiful photographs can serve as illustrations for Blauvelt's description of the hippie modern aesthetic. The woodbutcher interior is constructed of salvaged and repurposed building materials. These handmade homes cleverly reboot and remix the old with the new while simultaneously refuting status quo modern Eurocentric conventions such as bright antiseptic white kitchens with all the latest appliances. Instead, eclectic wood-filled kitchens with old woodburning stoves are featured, and yet these handmade interiors also contain modern objects like the mass-produced broom in the left corner.<sup>99</sup> The book also highlights bedrooms that look like they could have been made by any pioneering settler on the prairies with animal skins on the wall and oil lamps placed beside a bed with a handmade-looking quilt.<sup>100</sup> Shapiro deftly captured the hippie modern, rebooted, handmade, pioneering, Victorian aesthetic in each and every interior, and although the book is best described as a picture book, the foreword by architect Sim Van der Ryn also complements the images and possible motivations of the woodbutchers. He writes:

For some years we have heard the extravagant technological promise of housing at low cost. It has never come to pass. The answer to low cost housing, it seems to me, is to make a break with a 'standard of living' that makes us slaves to centralized decision-making and control, to an economy whose values are the magnitude of production and consumption. The dollar is not a reasonable measure of the quality of life or the quality of place. Yet most of us are still children of that dollar, and of the institutions we grew up in—we are conditioned to their ways. For most of us have grown up sharing little real experience or work. We have few rituals that celebrate our unity of body, mind and spirit. We are trying to find our way back into the earth family and there are few guides to show the way.<sup>101</sup>

This rejection of norms, escape from the current economic state, crafted eclecticism, and parallel architecture is also highlighted in Charles Jencks' 1982 edition of *Architecture Today* with an 80 page section titled "Alternatives" by William Chaitkin.<sup>102</sup> Although Jencks' section of *Architecture Today* features a few homes, the vast majority of the structures featured in Chaitkin's "Alternatives" are domestic in nature from geodesic domes made of recycled car parts and inspired by the work of Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983), to nomadic dwellings built atop trucks, to handmade homes built of found wood and adobe bricks. This focus on the domestic might be one of

the reasons why this section was not included in later editions of the book, a consequence parallel to Cicansky's domestic-themed work and especially to the *Wallpaper Flowers* series. Chaitkin describes the motivation behind these parallel forms of architecture as based in "vernacular nostalgia" because connections "between the natural environment, the built habitat, and human culture had been lost to modern housing."<sup>103</sup> These were the types of homes, filled with vernacular nostalgia, that many hippie modernists built.



**Figure 91** Victor Cicansky's Craven home, a former schoolhouse, 1980s. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

In 1974, hippie modernist Cicansky was not only channeling vernacular nostalgia while rebooting and repurposing a 1917 schoolhouse and planting a large vegetable garden in the yard (figs. 90 & 91), he also made within that productive interior the *Wallpaper Flowers* series and miniature domestic interiors such as *Rabbit Fancier* (fig. 74), *Sauerkraut Connection*, 1974 (fig. 92), and *Summer Memories*, c. 1974 (figs. 93 & 94). The *Wallpaper Flowers* example which opened this discussion (fig. 65), is a repurposed piece of one of the walls from Cicansky's miniature domestic architectural forays. Curiously, when asked about his own history with actual wallpaper, he wrote:

The first house Fran I bought on our return from California was a story and half on 2300 block Robinson... The house was well built but needed a lot of work inside. There were layers and layers of wallpaper. I started tearing it off the walls layer by layer. Got fed up and decided I would drywall the living room and dining room. I like white walls... Fran and I didn't like wallpaper. No wallpaper in Craven except the ceramic wallpaper I was creating in my studio... Decades later, 1992, I bought the house I'm in now. The kitchen had flocked green wallpaper with tiny gold deer! That had to go! That's my wallpaper history.<sup>104</sup>



**Figure 92** Victor Cicansky, *Sauerkraut Connection*, 1974. Earthenware, commercial glaze, lustre, commercial decals, rhinestones, plastic flowers, wood, acrylic paint, 47.5 x 48.0 x 37.0 cm. Collection: Canada Council Art Bank / Banque d'art du Conseil des arts du Canada, 74/5-0914. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Although his actual walls were not covered in wallpaper, he astutely used commercially available decals to create patterned walls within his miniature domestic interiors. With the *Rabbit Fancier*, the walls even have an interior decaled wallpaper side (fig. 74) and an exterior field stone side (fig. 75) like one of the *Wallpaper Flowers* examples found in Cicansky's photographic archive (fig. 82). In *Sauerkraut Connection*, the wallpapered wall makes an appearance again as well as a miniature terracotta plant pot set on the windowsill. Cicansky remixed the terracotta pot and wallpaper to become a life-sized potted *Wallpaper Flowers*. Interestingly enough, there is also another connection to Cicansky's Craven renovations:

Mrs. Shumagi [who was my godmother] came to visit in spring as usual. She was staying with my parents and Fran and I were living in our Lakeview house and working on renovating the school house. I was set to go to work after breakfast when my mother phoned to say that Mrs. Shumagi had come to visit and asked to see me. I drove over and Mrs. Shumagi called me into the bedroom my mother put her up in. She was holding a largish shoe box and told me the following story. The neighbourhood she was living in was changing and she was afraid someone would break into her [Winnipeg] house and steal her money. She did what a lot of people her age who didn't trust banks did and decided to bury the money in the garden. She'd sit by the garden window thinking that maybe someone saw her

bury the money and dig it up. So she dug it up herself and decided to bury it in the bottom of the garbage can. No one would look there. Days later she'd been thinking about the money and thought she might forget about the money and throw it out with the garbage. Sitting next to the sauerkraut barrel she decided to wrap the money in plastic and bury it in the sauerkraut. That wasn't good enough. What if the plastic broke and destroyed the money! She dug the money out and put it in a box and bought a bus ticket to Regina to give the money to me, her godson. It was enough money to pay for the renovations I was doing in Craven. To honor this experience, I created the sculpture *Sauerkraut Connection*.<sup>105</sup>



**Figure 93** Victor Cicansky, *Summer Memories*, c. 1974. Earthenware, commercial glaze, lustre, commercial decals, rhinestones, plastic flowers, wire, wood, acrylic paint, 46.9 x 32.9 x 33.5 cm. Collection: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1974.Dp.35. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Finally, *Summer Memories* (fig. 93) like *Sauerkraut Connection*, is made up of shattered segments of wallpapered walls just as the *Wallpaper Flowers* are. This miniature domestic interior is crammed with a wooden chair, leather bag, some type of unfinished textile project, three ceramic moonshine jugs, a can of spilled paint, a framed picture resting on the wooden floor, and a classical cherub displayed atop a plinth (fig. 94). This cluttered, layered eclecticism is reminiscent of both the popular press domestic



interiors of the 1970s as seen in the Schafer and Druxman examples as well as the hippie modernist, woodbutcher handmade dwellings: in Schafer's interior, the cherub makes an appearance, and the rough repurposed wooden floor and solid wooden chair are present in the woodbutcher's kitchen.



**Figure 94** Victor Cicansky, *Summer Memories* (detail), c. 1974. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Cicansky's ceramic 1970s domestic interiors and the actual interiors of the 1970s are lived in as opposed to the history-less modern interiors of the prior decade. There is a sense of accumulated history and individuality in Cicansky's domestic interiors which is echoed in the woodbutcher and Schafer examples. Until I had wallpapered the void with the concept of domesticity, I had grouped the ruined houses with Cicansky's outhouses (fig. 41), and therefore they were discussed in relation to the politics of water, classical architecture, and to Cicansky's exploration of local history and people. However, I had never actually looked at the interiors in relation to the changes taking place within 1970s home decoration, its associations with the social upheaval of the times, and how similar they are to alternative forms of architecture. The *Wallpaper Flowers* and Cicansky's turn towards the domestic have shed new light onto these works and highlighted how different they are from the outhouse series.

### Case Study: Ruins and Growth

Hine explains “the great funk aesthetic begins not with a blank slate but with a landscape filled with ruins—the ruins of communities and buildings, and the ruins of failed old ideas. It is based not simply on looking forward but rather on looking all around.”<sup>106</sup>

Some of the ruins, especially within urban centers, were also a result of the economic crisis of the early 1970s or of times past. People, in general, including artists, and hippie modernists like Cicansky started to notice all the places and things left over after supposed “progress,” and these objects and structures illuminated an alternative to a throwaway culture. As stated so eloquently by feminist and environmentalist writer Rebecca Solnit: “Ruins stand as reminders. Memory is always incomplete, always imperfect, always falling into ruin; but the ruins themselves, like other traces, are treasures: our links to what came before, our guide to situating ourselves in a landscape of time.”<sup>107</sup> Like the folded laundry and preserves, Cicansky is making visible within the *Wallpaper Flowers* series and in the miniature ceramic domestic ruins such as *Summer Memories*, aspects of home decorating which have a long history of being associated with female taste, duties, and work.

The *Wallpaper Flowers* (fig. 65) is a ruin, a remnant from the past, planted in the present in hopes of becoming something in the future. The combination of wallpaper and ruin is also significant as curator Gill Saunders points out in *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration*, wallpaper is fragile, ephemeral, and easy to replace and therefore has often disappeared from history.<sup>108</sup> Sometimes it is only known through photographs, just as the *Wallpaper Flowers* are currently only known through the photographic record; ironically, Cicansky’s ceramic *Wallpaper Flowers* has come to the same fate as the material it is mimicking. Like wallpaper’s spotty historical record, social historian Catherine Horwood explains in *Potted History: The Story of Plants in the Home*, it is hard to get a sense of what types of plants were grown in the home, where they were grown, and in what types of containers, as paintings of domestic interiors more often than not do not depict potted houseplants—lots of cut flowers but little evidence of the potted variety. For example, in the book *Eighteenth-century Ceramics: Products for a Civilised Society* by design historian Sarah Richards, only two plant-related pots are reproduced but no detailed

description of their use or placement within the home is included as Richards focuses more on the changing fashion of scents (from animal based to plant derived) and the colonial discoveries of a variety of plant life and their universal appeal as design motifs.<sup>109</sup> The pots' domestic history is absent. Yet they are discussed in 18<sup>th</sup> century writings, and companies like Wedgwood (figs. 95 & 96) manufactured pots specifically for plants which were to be grown in the home for decorative purposes.<sup>110</sup> The fact that Cicansky's wallpapered houseplant has been fossilized by way of the ceramic process adds conceptual depth on a material level and can be understood as honouring and making something ephemeral from the past that is associated with the domestic and female taste, permanent. However, the permanence of the ceramic wallpaper was not enough to overcome the bias against the domestic which Sparke has argued is due to the domestic being deemed, by a male-dominated modernist culture, as trivial and potentially damaging because the sentimentality and comfort associated with the material culture of feminine taste—wallpaper, potted plants, and overstuffed furniture—lacks sophistication and rationalism that is so exalted by modernism.<sup>111</sup>



**Figure 95** Josiah Wedgwood and Sons, *Bulb Pot*, c. 1785–1790. Jasperware with applied relief decoration. Collection: Victoria and Albert Museum, 3452 to B-1855. Source: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Professor Imogen Racz notes, “Wallpaper has long been the interior skin applied to the cocoon of space surrounding a house’s occupants, which also encapsulates and frames their aspirations, social class and personalities.”<sup>112</sup> Victorian craft reformer William Morris famously said, “Whatever you have in your rooms think first of the walls

for they are that which makes your house and home.”<sup>113</sup> Wallpaper reflected and continues to reflect the function of the space, the people occupying those papered rooms, and has been associated with nature.<sup>114</sup> For example, the natural world—patterns of flowers, vines, birds, and plants—was represented on wallpaper which covered the walls of Victorian homes and was associated with comfort as patterns were used to soften lines which psychologically enhanced the level of comfort within a room.<sup>115</sup> On a side note, the psychology of comfort (which was a part and parcel of Victorian female taste), also manifested itself in overstuffed furniture as “textile furnishings softened the world of sensation. They obliterated the edges of hard furniture surfaces and mediated, through structural padding, the contact of the body with seats.”<sup>116</sup> While in Davis, Cicansky made a life-sized overstuffed chair which appears to be soft and plushy, yet is rock hard. Cleverly, this contrast in look and feel relates to Sparke’s insights regarding the fact that it was not important the furniture be comfortable; it just had to look that way. In terms of the Victorian’s interest in nature and its relationship to the domestic and female taste, Sparke notes:

Whereas technological progress, seen emanating from outside the home, was linked to the idea of culture, that of nature stood boldly in opposition to it, suggesting a lost innocence, a rural idyll, which had to be retained if Victorian citizens were to maintain a balance between the spiritual and the material aspects of their lives. Ironically this will to spirituality was expressed in the home in an overtly material manner through the consumption of goods and decorations that evoked nature in a variety of ways. The furnishing and embellishments of the mid-Victorian home served to bring nature inside the domestic sphere. Potted plants and the addition of a conservatory filled with greenery achieved this literally, as did collections of flowers and small plants in bay windows. Many housewives also brought nature inside the home in the form of shells and other natural objects used as decorative items.<sup>117</sup>

The patterns on all the examples in the *Wallpaper Flowers* series, while achieved through the use of kitschy commercial decals, are nature based. In England, the Victorian times also saw an increase in suburban living as it was believed that moving away from the city center enabled people to be closer to nature and away from the heavily polluted air of the city.<sup>118</sup> A peripheral parallel can be made here to the numerous people who moved out of the cities in the 1970s in order to be closer to nature, nurture their spiritual growth, and to leave behind the economic turmoil so apparent within the cities. Also, the woodbutchers

and hippie modernists, whose turn towards vernacular nostalgia, as Chaitkin put it, strove to highlight the connections between the natural environment and the built habitat.<sup>119</sup>

Hine postulates the proliferation of house plants, as seen in interiors such as the Druxman example, reflected a psychological need to surround oneself with real growing things to encourage one's own growth as a spiritual being and custodian of the planet.<sup>120</sup> Like so many other facts about the domestic interiors of the 1970s, this too connects back to the Victorian pairing of nature with morality.



**Figure 96** Josiah Wedgwood and Sons, *Flower Pot and Stand*, late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Black basalt stoneware, decorated in white, 16.5 x 17.5 cm. Collection: Victoria and Albert Museum, given by J. H. Fitzhenry, 841&A-1905. Source: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Saunders points out wallpaper is essentially imitative, as it is always standing in for something else.<sup>121</sup> For example, when wallpaper started to be included in the home in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was designed to replace or stand in for textile wall hangings.<sup>122</sup> This chameleon-like history is echoed in Cicansky's tromp l'oeil rendering of the wall which also relates to the rich history of imitation within ceramics. Imitation and its links to feminine taste and design reform are of particular interest here as it is echoed in the modernist environment of the University of Saskatchewan, Regina campus where Cicansky originally made "honest," unadorned modernist pots (fig. 4).

In Britain, the 1830s and 1840s saw the first trade depressions since the beginning of industrialization, and the government, through various studies, came to the conclusion

that sub-par design was part of the problem and set about promoting design reform.<sup>123</sup> Reformers, such as Charles Eastlake (1836–1906) and A. W. N. Pugin (1812–1852), among others, quickly launched into attacking the aesthetic and ideological manifestations of feminine taste including fashion, novelty, and the role of display within the domestic interior which, according to Sparke, sustained women’s culture at the time and consequently consigned female taste to the marginal position it now occupies.<sup>124</sup> For example, Eastlake wrote despairingly of furniture at the time and equated it with female taste when he wrote: “The ladies like it best when it comes like a new toy from the shop, fresh with recent varnish and untarnished gilding.”<sup>125</sup> Pugin argued that disguising a material as something else, by painting or gilding it for example, was essentially deceitful and therefore he undermined the moral component of female taste and display:

Cast-iron is a deception; it is seldom or never left as iron. It is disguised by paint, either as stone, wood, or marble. This is a mere trick, and the severity of Christian or Pointed Architecture is utterly opposed to all deception.... Cheap deception of magnificence encourage persons to assume a semblance of decoration far beyond either their means or their station, and it is to this cause we may assign all that mockery of splendour which pervades even the dwellings of the lower classes of society. Glaring, showy, and meretricious ornament was never so much in vogue as at present; it disgraces every branch of our art and manufactures, and the correction of it should be an earnest consideration with every person who desires to see the real principles of art restored.<sup>126</sup>

Cicansky’s turn to the domestic, which was essentially a reaction to the modernism he had experienced during his undergraduate years, included a focus on creating ceramic objects that looked like they were made of another material, including the *Wallpaper Flowers* series. This reaction against the truth to materials dictum is not only a reaction to the modernism of the 1960s but also works with an aesthetic that was denigrated and associated with women by the design reformers of the Victorian period. In addition to the trompe l’oeil, his turn towards the domestic included the introduction of lustre (which I am sure Pugin would consider a highly deceitful material) into his aesthetic lexicon as seen in the golden frame in *Summer Memories* (fig. 94). In light of the domestic, the focus on wallpaper, the trompe l’oeil wall, and the use of lustre in so many of his sculptures aligns Cicansky’s work from the late 1960s and 1970s with the home and the feminine: morality, taste, work, and duty.



**Figure 97** John Sturt (original print), Trade card of Abraham Price's Blue Paper Warehouse, Aldermanbury, London, c. 1720. Paper, 29.5 x 23.4 cm. Collection: The British Museum, Heal,91.45. Source: © The Trustees of the British Museum.



**Figure 98** James Wheelley's Paper Hanging Warehouse, 1765–1809. Etching on paper, 15.1 x 17.8 cm. Collection: The British Museum, Heal,91.59. Source: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Women have not always been associated with home decorating. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the responsibility for furnishing the home was typically associated with the male members of a household—books were geared to the gentleman of the house—although women often initiated and managed the work.<sup>127</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> century also marked the appearance of wallpaper in the home and the development of the concept of the “houseplant.” Horwood explains houseplants were plants brought into the home for ornamental purposes rather than for medicinal, food, or pest control purposes which can be traced back to Egyptian times.<sup>128</sup> Notably, in 1608, Sir Hugh Platt published *Floraes Paradise* which contained a small section on gardening “within doores.”<sup>129</sup> Like furnishing the home, it was a gentleman’s duty at this time to stay abreast of and to participate in all the latest botanical developments. Therefore, plant tending was associated with men.<sup>130</sup> As already stated, the history of both the houseplant and wallpaper is haphazard at best, and the role women played in terms of the selection and display of these products within the home can be pieced together based on their mention in publications and inclusion in images. Although it was the responsibility of the gentleman to furnish the house, women are clearly depicted in active roles in two 18<sup>th</sup> century wallpaper trade cards (figs. 97 & 98) and in a 1799 illustration of a “Botany Bens” seen selling plants to a woman (fig. 99), who would occasionally trade plants for old clothes—an interesting craft connection between plants and textiles.<sup>131</sup> In 1734, nurseryman Robert Furber included the chapter “A Flower-Garden for Gentlemen and Ladies: of The Art of raising Flowers without any Trouble; to blow in full Perfection in the Depth of Winter, in a Bed-Chamber, Closet, or Dining Room as practised by Sir Thom More, Bart” in his guide book *The Flower Garden Display’d* where More suggested the added benefit of hydroponic indoor gardening is that it can appeal to “‘the Curious of the Fair Sex’, because it would be a ‘much neater and cleaner Way’ of growing flowers ‘with the most delicious Perfumes thereof, in their Chambers or Parlours.’”<sup>132</sup> Historian Ruth Goodman notes by the 1850s, girls, women and clergymen became increasingly involved with botany and gardening—both in and outside the home—as it became an acceptable front of science for girls and “was seen as an expression of nurturing, domestic virtues, embodying a love of order and neatness alongside taste and botanical expertise.”<sup>133</sup> Subsequently, numerous publications were



written for them, and tools were redesigned for “lady gardeners.”<sup>134</sup> Goodman quotes the 1868 *Home Book* which states “the flower garden, in all its various forms, can scarcely fail to be the delight, the occupation, the pride, the glory of the English girl.”<sup>135</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century when cheap wallpaper became available, the books and advertisements for wallpaper were geared towards women, and it was by the 20<sup>th</sup> century considered a housewife’s chore or an activity for the entire family.<sup>136</sup> Within the bound volume of *Canadian Homes* magazines from 1974–76 where Druxman and Schafer are featured, there are no specific advertisements or articles discussing wallpaper, but there are a number of advertisements for flooring, wall decals, and gardening targeting women directly, proving that female taste and the subsequent activity of home decorating was at the time still an important aspect within the Canadian home.



**Figure 99** Thomas Rowlandson, *Cries of London, No. 6: All a growing, a growing, Here's flowers for your gardens*, 1799. Etching on paper, 44 x 30 cm. Collection: Boston Public Library, The Albert H. Wiggin Collection, 1941. Source: Digital Commonwealth, <https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/tq57pm237>.

In addition to the history of wallpaper and its association with female taste, the *Wallpaper Flowers* series also relates to Cicansky's ongoing interest in his upbringing in east end Regina. Although it was a luxury good in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, by the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wallpaper was found in all types of houses including tenements and public buildings in the USA, Canada, and Europe—it was not solely for luxurious spaces (fig. 100).<sup>137</sup> Wallpaper was used as a cheap way to hide flaws in a wall due to faulty construction, low quality materials, or damage caused by water or moisture which were more often than not found in cheaper housing.<sup>138</sup> Unlike grand homes that did not undergo continuous redecoration or have been restored to their original state (therefore the wallpaper choices have made it into the historical record), these modest homes were often repapered due to change of occupancy or sometimes as often as every two years in order to freshen up the room (consequently the wallpaper choices have not made it into the historical record).<sup>139</sup> In fact, in east end Regina, not one of the original houses remains and of the small wartime houses that replaced them, there appears to be little desire to make historical restorations. Therefore, not much is known about the types of paper found on the walls in these Regina homes yet Cicansky made ceramic homes with wallpaper—tantalizingly connecting ruin to memory and reminding one of the landscape of time.



**Figure 100** *Regina Board of Trade at the old Town Hall, c. 1890.* Photograph, 17 x 17 cm. Collection: City of Regina Archives, CORA-RPL-A-296. Reproduced by permission of the City of Regina Archives.

Generally speaking, 18<sup>th</sup> century England saw the widespread commercial production of decorative pots for household plants.<sup>140</sup> Plain, clay flowerpots were available since medieval times but for outdoor use; once a plant came inside, and if it was to be kept in its pot, the outdoor pot was placed inside a cachepot or reed or cloth covers were woven around the vessel.<sup>141</sup> Although the *Wallpaper Flowers* are all in terracotta pots—which might preclude one considering them to be outdoor plants—the combination of domestic wall and pot equals a visual play on words as they are literally “house plants.” When turned on their side, it becomes obvious these terracotta vessels are not the commercial versions purchased from the local garden center but are instead press moulded copies.<sup>142</sup> I recently asked Cicansky why recreate terracotta pots, and he answered: “I am fond of the ubiquitous terra cotta plant pots. The fired red clay is earth.... Clay pots absorb water and are healthier for plants—better than plastic. Plastic manufacture is a pollutant! Clay is free for the taking. We walk on it. Shape it, fire it and you’ve got a clay pot.”<sup>143</sup> Interestingly enough, the material for a plant pot was up for debate in the early 1970s, and Cicansky’s choice for the 1974 series is telling. William Davidson states in his 1969 guidebook *Woman’s Own Book of Houseplants*, which strangely enough contains a number of illustrations of houseplants in what looks to be terracotta pots within the modern home including one which also features wallpaper: “Much controversy still reigns over the pros and cons of plastic pots compared to clay ones...However, as we all know...the clay pot with its many drawbacks is dying a comparatively rapid death. Have no qualms about selecting the plastic pot; most plants do equally well in them and many do very much better.”<sup>144</sup> Therefore, Cicansky’s choice of plant pot relates to his interest in materials but also rejects the trend at the time to adopt plastic, electing to stay with the more traditional and natural clay pot, a very hippie modernist choice.

Cicansky’s potted walls directly relate to the decorating schemes and objects found within typical 1970s domestic interiors which can be traced back to the Victorian era’s combining of the domestic with nature, morality, beauty, women, and female taste. His choice of subject matter—wallpaper and houseplant—and materials, highlights his turn towards the domestic and makes the *Wallpaper Flowers* series some of his most overtly domestically charged objects which very well might be a contributing factor to

their absence. Recall, the *Wallpaper Flowers* (fig. 65) is a ruin, a remnant from the past, planted in the present in hopes of becoming something in the future. By planting a piece of the past in Cicansky's mid 1970s present, he overtly rejected the modernist mindset of creating a future without a past. Even today, the absent *Wallpaper Flowers* series leads me to the question: what can we learn from the past that will make the future a better place?

## Conclusion

“Maybe a house is a machine to slow down time, a barrier against history, a hope that nothing will happen, though something always does. But the materials themselves are sometimes hedges against time, the objects that change and decay so much more slowly than we do....”<sup>145</sup> – Rebecca Solnit

Domestic      Forgotten      Layered      Eclectic      Ruins      Growth

In 1974, Christopher Lowell reviewed the *Ceramics '74* exhibition in *Tactile* magazine and says of Cicansky's work:

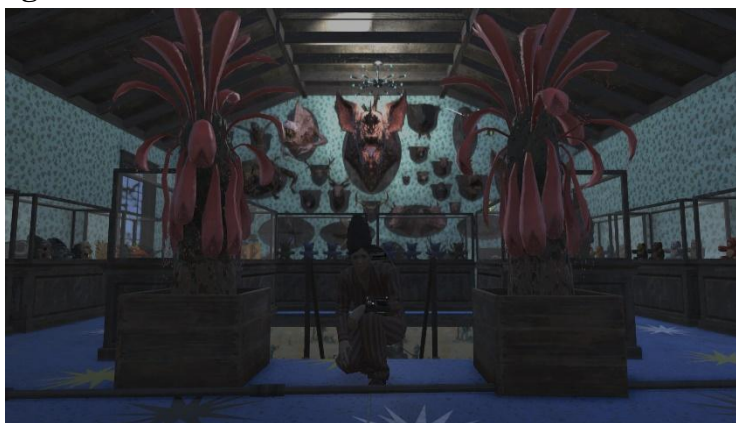
The shallow playfulness and rustic sophistication of Victor Cicansky are tempered by a sneaky sense of irony and overtones of grim absurdity. A feeling of barren, low-horizoned western lives emerges from his elegiac images of dereliction and oppressive melancholy. His twist on Arneson and Gilhooly's flowerpots is the happily subversive tactic of potting ceramic chunks of peeling, rose papered wallboard into his own slipcast plantpots, of forming a malignantly beautiful vining rose among stones. As art they are floridly romantic, mordantly humorous, pungent, inventive and tough.<sup>146</sup>

This review, opens with “Gazooks! People tour the terrain, craning as the crackpots, bozos, magicians, tightrope walkers, stoned-out mumblers, luminaries, and fledglings flaunt their stuff...Vic flowerpots his wallpaper and gurgles on about a champagne birdbath.”<sup>147</sup> Although the article takes a very critical look at the curatorial decisions of the Canadian Guild of Potters' *Ceramics '74* exhibition, Lowell does guardedly appreciate the wit, humour, and grim take on western life that Cicansky's *Wallpaper Flowers* communicate. However, like so much of the discourse surrounding Cicansky, his turn towards the domestic has been overlooked in favour of his ties to funk art, a growing interest in regional history and reality of the time, and the hippie movement (as alluded to

in the comment “stoned-out mumblers”). As mentioned earlier, the *Wallpaper Flowers* series are absent objects and are currently only found in the photographic record and in the one review by Lowell. While a few of his other early works such as his clothing and certainly the majority of his architectural sculptures are found in private and public collections, this chapter set out to explore why the *Wallpaper Flowers* series is absent by taking up the very notion of absence rather than accepting it as I did when curating Cicansky’s retrospective.

Prown’s deductive approach to the study of objects enabled me to discover how domesticity relates to both the absent *Wallpaper Flowers* series and to its current state of absence. The focus on the domestic, in turn, has opened up for me a new post-curatorial absent object-inspired process where I can critically examine the decisions I make surrounding absent objects. This post-curatorial absent object-inspired approach can also be used to critically examine the objects or themes that were included or omitted in an exhibition. By metaphorically wallpapering the void or jigsaw puzzle box of the artist Cicansky with the domestic, it becomes obvious just how far his early work is, including the *Wallpaper Flowers* series, from Arneson’s Funk inspired *Flower Pot*, 1967<sup>148</sup> which Lowell alludes to in his review of Cicansky’s wallpaper. Arneson’s work does not relate to the domestic; his flower pot, like his practice in general, was pre-occupied with the discourse of sculpture, craft, and the boundaries of the field of ceramics whereas Cicansky’s wallpaper flower pot is the ultimate manifestation of his turn towards the domestic in the late 1960s and 1970s. The revelation of this turn sheds new light and understanding on work from this period and its association with female labour and taste which Alison Calder has so astutely questioned. Whereas his early ceramic objects have been framed in terms of funk, folk, a celebration of his ethnic identity, and regional roots, this new absent object-inspired approach has reframed, for me, a number of his early objects adding conceptual depth (aesthetic, material, and gender), historical associations (wallpaper and potted plants), and contemporaneous relevance (1970 social upheaval and interior decorating schemes) to an already rich oeuvre.

## Postscript: Fragmented Futures



**Figure 101** Photograph of an interior home in *Fallout 76* constructed by Yolande Krueger. Photo: Yolande Krueger.

Writing this chapter has got me thinking a lot about wallpaper, the domestic interior, and absent craft in instances where past, present, and future all virtually collapse into one. Subsequently, another haunting, which started with a longing for wallpaper in the videogame *Fallout76*, has been brewing in and occupying the back of my mind. I have come to see numerous connections between Cicansky's turn to the domestic and the massively multiplayer online (MMO) video game *Fallout 76*, 2018 by Bethesda Game Studios. Within this videogame, players are able to build their own houses in a virtual mid-century modern post-apocalyptic world where ruined papered walls and potted plants abound (fig. 101). The activities of gamers such as those who play *Fallout* or *The Sims*, as art history professor Bridget Elliot has pointed out in "From Playhouse to PlayStation: The Dollhouses of Wyn Geleynse, David Hoffos, and Heather Benning," engage with interior design.<sup>149</sup> However, I would like to add that they are also very craft-like as they develop skills in order to engage with the materials and processes of making things within a strict set of rules (the virtual world and the code itself). While somewhat dated now, Malcolm McCullough described the concept of craft in "Abstracting Craft: The Practiced Digital Hand" as, "Craft remains skilled work applied towards practical ends. It is indescribable talent with describable aims. It is habitual skilled practice with particular tools, materials, or media, for the purpose of making increasingly well-executed artifacts. Craft is the application of personal knowledge to the giving of form."<sup>150</sup> McCullough convincingly argues there is a close relationship between virtual work and craft practice: hand and brain activities, problem solving skills, working within a set of rules, and

commitment to a particular material.<sup>151</sup> Craft today is no longer bound to the physical object alone. Jeweller Ann Marie Shillito explains craft relies on knowledge that is acquired through experience, and in order to build a house in *Fallout*, hours upon hours of gameplay are needed just as hours upon hours of hotshop “play” are needed in order to blow a vase.<sup>152</sup>

However, what’s more fascinating is that through observing my sister play the game, I have come to the conclusion the vast majority of the players are men and a number of them feel the need to build domestic interiors replete with potted plants and now wallpaper (a recent addition). Yet up until I started to think about absence, the craft-like building activities in *Fallout* were absent from my definition of craft. I now find this absence exceptionally troubling as Sparke has argued: “Increasingly we all inhabit not only a visual, material, and spatial world but also a virtual one. Indeed, it is in this last environment that many of our fantasies and desires are being most fully lived out, through films and videos but also, most importantly, through interactive games.”<sup>153</sup> If I am to understand the history of craft and its relationship to contemporary issues and being, then I must include within my definition of craft these virtual forms of crafting as well. For example, how might this current return to the domestic with a mid-century modern take on the future compare with Cicansky’s *Wallpaper Flowers*. How does *Fallout* and Cicansky engage with notions of the past, present, and future from a great funk position? What role does gender play within these two examples? And why has gamer-related craft been absent from my definition of craft? Fragments to piece together for future understandings of craft. Lots to think about...

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<sup>1</sup> Jules David Prown, “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method,” in *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 82.

<sup>2</sup> Glenn Adamson, “The Case of the Missing Footstool: Reading the Absent Object,” in *History and Material Culture: A Student’s Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London: Routledge, 2009), 192.

<sup>3</sup> *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener’s Universe* was curated by Timothy Long and Julia Krueger, organized and circulated by the MacKenzie Art Gallery, and made possible in part by the Government of Canada through the Museums Assistance Program. Exhibition itinerary includes: MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina, SK (June 8–October 23, 2019); Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Charlottetown, PE (January 25–April 26, 2020); and originally scheduled at Glenbow, Calgary, AB (June 20–September 20, 2020) but cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The MacKenzie Art Gallery has also published an exhibition catalogue under the same title and held a symposium on June 8, 2019 at the MacKenzie Art Gallery featuring the authors in the catalogue: Alison Calder, Trevor Herriot, Julia Krueger, Timothy Long and Susan Surette. The symposium can be viewed on YouTube at

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5Mf\\_qQX3PA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5Mf_qQX3PA). For more information on the exhibition see <https://mackenzie.art/exhibition/victor-cicansky-the-gardeners-universe/>.

<sup>4</sup> Adamson, "The Case of the Missing Footstool," 192–207 and Jules Prown, "Mind in Matter," 81–84.

<sup>5</sup> The Regina Five were Kenneth Lochhead (1926–2006), Arthur McKay (1926–2000), Douglas Morton (1916–2001), Ted Godwin (1933–2013), and Ronald Bloore (1925–2009).

<sup>6</sup> For an in-depth discussion on Greenberg's impact on Saskatchewan painting and art see John O'Brian, ed., *The Flat of the Landscape: The Emma Lake Artists' Workshops* (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> John O'Brian, "The Flat Side of the Landscape: The Emma Lake Artists' Workshops," in *The Flat Side of the Landscape: The Emma Lake artists' Workshops*, ed. John O'Brian (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 1989), 15.

<sup>8</sup> O'Brian, "The Flat Side of the Landscape," 15.

<sup>9</sup> Vic Cicansky, *Up from Garlic Flats: My Life and the Making of an Artist* (Regina: Radiant Press, 2019), 73.

<sup>10</sup> Curator Garth Johnson discusses Arneson in relation to "Nut Artists" in the essay "A 'Nut' Grows in California," and curator Peter Selz included Arneson in the 1967 exhibition *Funk*. Garth Johnson, "A 'Nut Grows in California,'" in *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener's Universe*, eds. Timothy Long and Julia Krueger (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2019), 37–55; and Peter Selz, *Funk* (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1967).

<sup>11</sup> Other faculty members who had an impact on Cicansky include Roy De Forest (1930–2007) and William T. Wiley.

<sup>12</sup> The Whole Earth Festival was first celebrated in 1969 at UC Davis in the form of a small art class project aimed at teaching other students in an interactive way about activism, wellness, and environmental sustainability. Cicansky was not directly involved with the project but was on campus at this time. In 1971, the event was renamed the Whole Earth Festival in 1971. "History," Whole Earth, UC Davis, <https://wef.ucdavis.edu/about/history/>, accessed December 4, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Blauvelt, "Preface," in *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, ed. Andrew Blauvelt (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2016), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Blauvelt, "Preface," 13.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Hine, *The Great Funk: Styles of the Shaggy, Sexy, Shameless 1970s* (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2007), 165.

<sup>16</sup> William Chaitkin, "Alternatives," in *Architecture Today*, ed. Charles Jencks (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1982), 223. For more information on the exhibition see Selz, *Funk* and Clayton Schuster, "Looking Back at the Strange and Surly History of Bay Area Funk Art," *Hyperallergic*, April 18, 2017, <https://hyperallergic.com/372519/looking-back-at-the-strange-and-surly-history-of-bay-area-funk-art/>, accessed January 19, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Nancy Janovicek, "Rural Countercultures," in *Back to the Land: Ceramics from Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands 1970–1985*, ed. Diane Carr (Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2012), 13.

<sup>18</sup> Julia Krueger, "Chronology," in *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener's Universe*, eds. Timothy Long and Julia Krueger (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2019), 177.

<sup>19</sup> Denis Smith, "October Crisis," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Canada, article published August 13, 2013; last edited May 15, 2019, <https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/october-crisis>, accessed November 16, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> D.R. Gree, C. Bawden, W.J. Cretney and C.S. Wong, *The Alert Bay Oil Spill: A One-Year Study of the Recovery of a Contaminated Bay* (Victoria: Environment Canada, 1974).

<sup>21</sup> Indigenous Foundations, "The White Paper 1969," First Nations & Indigenous Studies, The University of British Columbia, 2009, [https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the\\_white\\_paper\\_1969/](https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_white_paper_1969/), accessed February 24, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> "Canadian Multiculturalism Policy, 1971," Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/canadian-multiculturalism-policy-1971>, accessed November 16, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Doris Anderson and Maude-Emmanuelle Lambert, "National Action Committee on the Status of Women," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Canada, article published February 07, 2006; last Edited March 22, 2017, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/national-action-committee-on-the-status-of-women>, accessed November 16, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> "Timeline: LGBTQ2S," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/timeline/lgbtq2>, accessed November 16, 2019.



- <sup>25</sup> Lorraine Snyder, "Rosemary Brown," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Canada, article published January 27, 2010; last Edited October 18, 2018, <https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/rosemary-brown>, accessed November 16, 2019.
- <sup>26</sup> R.C. Macleod, "Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Canada, article published February 07, 2006; last Edited June 05, 2019, <https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/royal-canadian-mounted-police>, accessed November 16, 2019.
- <sup>27</sup> Amanda Robinson, "Mary Two-Axe Earley," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Canada, article published March 21, 2017; last Edited October 18, 2018, <https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/mary-two-axe-earley>, accessed November 16, 2019.
- <sup>28</sup> Krueger, "Chronology," 177.
- <sup>29</sup> The hunt for *Memories of California* included pouring over Cicansky's personal archives for any mention of the piece. A letter from the Hansen-Fuller gallery dated December 9, 1976, states that "the status of the Fountain and Chair are the following: For now they can stay where they are at 737 Buena Vista West, the Gene Estribou's residence." I contacted Mr. Estribou who now lives in Vancouver, Washington. He did not remember the fountain in any way but thought that if anyone could help me it would be his ex-wife who now lives in New York. However, I was unable to locate her.
- <sup>30</sup> Karen Harvey, "Introduction: Practical Matters," in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternate Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 2.
- <sup>31</sup> Harvey, "Introduction," 2.
- <sup>32</sup> I am indebted to Brent Wiancko who in 2011 coined the term "object-inspired" during a *HIS9834B History of Things: An Introduction to Material Culture* seminar discussion.
- <sup>33</sup> When the installation team brought *The November Pantry*, 1988 into the gallery during the installation of *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener's Universe* the object inspired us to include it in the exhibition as it was a pantry we had decided not to use. It became abundantly clear when the piece was in the gallery space with all the bronze pieces that it illustrated the connection between the bronze furniture and the pantry as a piece of domestic furniture and therefore we decided to add it into the exhibition at the last minute.
- <sup>34</sup> Prown, "Mind in Matter," 78–84.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.
- <sup>36</sup> Prown stresses that the deductions drawn from an object must "meet the test of reasonableness and common sense;... [otherwise] they must be considered hypothetical and deferred to the next [Speculation] stage." Prown, "Mind in Matter," 81.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>38</sup> Jules Prown, "Style as Evidence," in *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 65.
- <sup>39</sup> The incomplete photocopy of the article (only page 4 was copied) was found in 2005-53 "Victor Cicansky. Personal and Professional Papers. 1953–2000," University of Regina, Archives and Special Collections. The photocopied page is from Christopher Lowell, "ceramics'74: The Clay's the Thing," *Tactile* 8, no. 3 (July-August 1974): 4. On a funny absent-related side, when I tried to locate a complete copy of this review, volume 8 of *Tactile* magazine at the University of Calgary had one page cut from it—page 3/4, leaving me fact-to-face once again with a somewhat absent article about an absent object.
- <sup>40</sup> Joyner Canadian Art Online Auction, "Lot 226, Victor Cicansky, Wallpaper Flowers," Waddington's, September 22, 2011, <https://www.waddingtons.ca/auction/joyner-canadian-art-online-auction-sep-22-2011/gallery/lot/226/>, accessed December 10, 2019.
- <sup>41</sup> Gill Perry, *Playing at Home: The House in Contemporary Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 25–26.
- <sup>42</sup> Adamson, "The Case of the Missing Footstool," 192.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.
- <sup>44</sup> Perry, *Playing at Home*, 17.
- <sup>45</sup> Sophie Bowlby, Susan Gregory and Linda McKie, "'Doing Home': Patriarchy, Caring, and Space," *Women's Studies International Forum* 20, no. 3 (May–June 1997): 343–344.
- <sup>46</sup> Christopher Reed, "Introduction," *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, ed. Christopher Reed (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 7.

- <sup>47</sup> Penny Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College, 2010), 10.
- <sup>48</sup> Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink*, xxv.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, xxvi.
- <sup>50</sup> Reed, "Introduction," 8.
- <sup>51</sup> Qtd. in Reed, "Introduction," 9.
- <sup>52</sup> Qtd. in Reed, "Introduction," 11.
- <sup>53</sup> Qtd. in Reed, "Introduction," 11.
- <sup>54</sup> Reed, "Introduction," 15.
- <sup>55</sup> Vic Cicansky, *Up from Garlic Flats: My Life and the Making of an Artist* (Regina: Radiant Press, 2019), 71.
- <sup>56</sup> Cicansky, *Up from Garlic Flats*, 71.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>58</sup> The term "hidden life" is inspired by the Frances Borzello's book *At Home: The Domestic Interior in Art*. Frances Borzello, *At Home: The Domestic Interior in Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006).
- <sup>59</sup> Amy Gogarty, "Remediating Craft," in *Utopic Impulses: Contemporary Ceramics Practice*, eds. Ruth Chambers, Amy Gogarty and Mireille Perron (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2007), 91–110.
- <sup>60</sup> Frances Borzello, *At Home: The Domestic Interior in Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), 26.
- <sup>61</sup> Bowlby, Gregory and McKie, "'Doing Home,'" 346.
- <sup>62</sup> Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: The Women's Press, 1984), 5.
- <sup>63</sup> Alison Calder, "Victor Cicansky's Post-Prairie Imaginings," in *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener's Universe*, eds. Timothy Long and Julia Krueger (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2019), 86.
- <sup>64</sup> Cicansky, *Up from Garlic Flats*, 101.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.
- <sup>66</sup> Cicansky's ceramic preserves, with their gold lustre, have been compared to Orthodox Romanian icons by Timothy Long. Timothy Long, "Cicansky's Whole Earth Romanian Icon," in *Victor Cicansky: The Gardener's Universe*, eds. Timothy Long and Julia Krueger (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2019), 57–67.
- <sup>67</sup> Blauvelt, "Preface," 11–12.
- <sup>68</sup> Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink*, 7.
- <sup>69</sup> Sharon Haar and Christopher Reed, "Coming Home: A Postscript on Postmodernism," in *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, ed. Christopher Reed (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 253.
- <sup>70</sup> Perry, *Playing at Home*, 18.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.
- <sup>72</sup> "Semi-Detached by Michael Landy," Tate Britain Exhibition, 18 May – 12 December, 2004, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/semi-detached-michael-landy>, accessed February 25, 2020.
- <sup>73</sup> "Place (Village), Rachel Whiteread," V&A Museum of Childhood, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/moc/exhibitions/placevillage/>, accessed February 25, 2020.
- <sup>74</sup> Graeme Patterson, "Woodrow," <https://www.graemepatterson.com/Woodrow.htm>, accessed February 25, 2020.
- <sup>75</sup> Perry, *Playing at Home*, 106.
- <sup>76</sup> A second ceramic hat from the Allan Stone collection sold \$615 USD on October 28, 2016 through Cowan's Auction to a private collector. For more information see Modern Ceramics & Modern Art + Design: Live Salesroom Auction, "Lot 35: U.C.D. Cap," Cowan's A Hindman Company, <https://www.cowanauctions.com/lot/victor-cicansky-1935-canada-561997>, accessed December 15, 2019. An aluminum hat is housed at the University of Regina Archives and Special Collections. Aside from these three examples, no other hats are known to exist.
- <sup>77</sup> Julia Krueger to Victor Cicansky, "Sorry to bother you but I have a few more questions....," e-mail correspondence, January 19, 2020.
- <sup>78</sup> The private collector is my partner Don Thauberger. As a collector of Cicansky's contemporary work, I thought he might be interested in a historical example so I alerted him to the sale. I believe he would have been hesitant about purchasing the work had it not been on sale.

<sup>79</sup> I also informally alerted a Canadian gallery to the Cowan's auction sale of the Allan Stone collection where a hat, tie and numerous small chairs were being sold. The gallery did not bid.

<sup>80</sup> The trade was confirmed in Julia Krueger to Victor Cicansky, "Sorry to bother you but I have a few more questions..." e-mail correspondence, January 19, 2020.

<sup>81</sup> In 1980, Gilhooly donated 89 artworks in total (54 ceramics and the rest were paintings, drawings and sketchbooks). Rumour has it that the donation was made in order to alleviate some tax issues he was having after he completed *The Bread Wall* mural in 1979 for the Harry Hayes Building in Calgary, Alberta. For more information on *The Bread Wall* see Barbara Kwasny and Elaine Peake, *A Second Look at Calgary's Public Art* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1992), 20.

<sup>82</sup> David Gilhooly to Stuart McKinnon, December 14, 1979. Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB.

<sup>83</sup> See Julia Krueger, "Of Thread and Branches: Victor Cicansky's Crafted Path," within this dissertation for an in-depth discussion on his relationship to textiles and other forms of craft and craft theory.

<sup>84</sup> Phyllis Lyons Broudy, "Planning interiors," *The Globe and Mail*, November 15, 1975, BL6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>85</sup> Jordan Runtagh, "Inside Elvis Presley's Legendary Man-Cave Studio," *Rolling Stone*, August 8, 2016, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/inside-elvis-presleys-legendary-man-cave-studio-248975/>.

<sup>86</sup> George Thomas Kapelos, "The Small House in Print: Promoting the Modern Home to Post-War Canadians Through Pattern Books, Journals, and Magazines," *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada* 34, no. 1 (2009): 33.

<sup>87</sup> Kapelos, "The Small House in Print," 34–35.

<sup>88</sup> Margit Bennett, "They Put the Pool in the Front Yard," *Canadian Homes* 38, no. 4 (April 1961): 19–21.

<sup>89</sup> Bennett, "They Put the Pool in the Front Yard," 20.

<sup>90</sup> Bowlby, Gregory and McKie, "'Doing Home,'" 344.

<sup>91</sup> Vicki Innes, "The dramatic touch," *Canadian Homes* (March 9, 1974): 2–3 and "Color It Green," *Canadian Homes* (November 20, 1976): 2–4.

<sup>92</sup> Hine, *The Great Funk*, 165.

<sup>93</sup> Blauvelt, "Preface," 11–12.

<sup>94</sup> Although the Barcelona Chair was designed in 1929, in 1948 Knoll Inc. began manufacturing the chair. Knoll is an American furniture company associated with modern design. Therefore, although this chair is based off of a historical design by Mies van der Rohe, it is considered a modern icon. "Barcelona Chair, 1929," Cooper Hewitt, <https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18678299/>, accessed November 26, 2019.

<sup>95</sup> To view an image visit Lloyd Alter, "A look at Alison Smithson's 1956 House of the Future," *Treehugger*, December 23, 2016, <https://www.treehugger.com/interior-design/look-alison-smithsons-1956-house-future.html>, accessed January 19, 2020.

<sup>96</sup> Anne Massey, *Interior Design Since 1900*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), 171–173.

<sup>97</sup> Innes, "The dramatic touch," 3.

<sup>98</sup> Art Boericke, *Handmade Houses: A Guide to the Woodbutcher's Art* (San Francisco: A & W Visual Library, 1973).

<sup>99</sup> For the image see Boericke, *Handmade Houses*, 79.

<sup>100</sup> For the image see Boericke, *Handmade Houses*, 30.

<sup>101</sup> Sim Van der Ryn, "Foreword," in *Handmade Houses*, no page.

<sup>102</sup> Chaitkin, "Alternatives," 218–299.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 222.

<sup>104</sup> Julia Krueger to Victor Cicansky, "Sorry to bother you but I have a few more questions..." e-mail correspondence, January 19, 2020.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>106</sup> Hine, *The Great Funk*, 21.

<sup>107</sup> Rebecca Solnit, "The Ruins of Memory," in *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 355.

<sup>108</sup> Gill Saunders, *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 2002), 7.

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- <sup>109</sup> Sarah Richards, *Eighteenth-century Ceramics: Products for a Civilised Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 113–120.
- <sup>110</sup> Catherine Horwood, *Potted History: The Story of Plants in the Home* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2007), 67–68.
- <sup>111</sup> Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink*, xxvi.
- <sup>112</sup> Imogen Racz, *Art and the Home: Comfort, Alienation and the Everyday* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2015), 20.
- <sup>113</sup> Saunders, *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration*, 7.
- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, 16.
- <sup>115</sup> Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink*, 21.
- <sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 22.
- <sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 18–19.
- <sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 18.
- <sup>119</sup> Chaitkin, “Alternatives,” 222.
- <sup>120</sup> Hine, *The Great Funk*, 164.
- <sup>121</sup> Saunders, *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration*, 7.
- <sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 11.
- <sup>123</sup> Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink*, 31.
- <sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 30–33.
- <sup>125</sup> Qtd. in Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink*, 38.
- <sup>126</sup> A. Welby Pugin, “On Metal-work [1841],” in *The Theory of Decorative Art: An Anthology of European & American Writings, 1750–1940*, ed. Isabelle Frank (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 154.
- <sup>127</sup> Saunders, *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration*, 13.
- <sup>128</sup> Horwood, *Potted History*, 13.
- <sup>129</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 25.
- <sup>131</sup> Saunders, *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration*, 28 and Horwood, *Potted History*, 50.
- <sup>132</sup> Qtd. in Horwood, *Potted History*, 53.
- <sup>133</sup> Ruth Goodman, *How to be a Victorian* (London: The Penguin Group, 2014), 346–347.
- <sup>134</sup> Goodman, *How to be a Victorian*, 347.
- <sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 346.
- <sup>136</sup> Saunders, *Wallpaper in Interior Decoration*, 13 and 43.
- <sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 22.
- <sup>138</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 24.
- <sup>140</sup> Horwood, *Potted History*, 60.
- <sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 117.
- <sup>142</sup> Julia Krueger to Victor Cicansky, “Sorry to bother you but I have a few more questions...,” e-mail correspondence, January 19, 2020.
- <sup>143</sup> Julia Krueger to Victor Cicansky, “A question about your potted veggies,” e-mail correspondence, October 22, 2019.
- <sup>144</sup> William Davidson, *Woman's Own Book of House Plants* (London: Hamlyn, 1969), 10.
- <sup>145</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Inside Out* (San Francisco: Artspace Books, 2006), 12.
- <sup>146</sup> Lowell, “ceramics’74,” 4.
- <sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, 2.
- <sup>148</sup> To view an image of this piece, visit The Marks Project, <https://www.themarksproject.org/marks/arneson-0>.
- <sup>149</sup> Bridget Elliot, “From Playhouse to PlayStation: The Dollhouses of Wyn Geleynse, David Hoffos, and Heather Benning,” in *Breaking and Entering: The Contemporary House Cut, Spliced, and Haunted*, ed. Bridget Elliott (McGill-Queens University Press, 2015), 195.

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<sup>150</sup> Malcolm McCullough, “Abstracting Craft: The Practiced Digital Hand,” 1996, in *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford: New York, 2010), 311–312.

<sup>151</sup> Ann Marie Shillito, *Digital Crafts: Industrial Technologies for Applied Artists and Designer Makers* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 10.

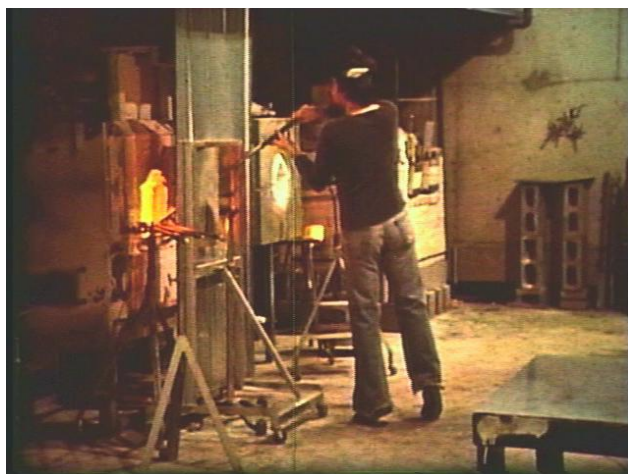
<sup>152</sup> Shillito, *Digital Crafts*, 27.

<sup>153</sup> Penny Sparke, *The Genius of Design* (London: Alhambra Editions, 2009), 244.

## Chapter 3

### Shattering the Cannon and Spinning a Discourse: Playing with Early Prairie Glass

The natural history of glass begins dramatically wherever there are volcanoes, whose fiery eruptions emit rivers of molten rock including obsidian, a darkly coloured and highly opaque glass that was worked by prehistoric and ancient civilizations into a variety of tools. The Roman historian Pliny passed on the legend that mirrors made from obsidian reflect only shadows, not images. Through a glass darkly? In a tremendous reversal of scale, contemporary glass required the development of very small furnaces—portable volcanoes, so to speak—so that artists could make glass in their own studios.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 102** Still photograph from a 2 minute film of Marty Kaufman blowing glass at the Alberta College of Art (ACA), c. 1979 by the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT). Reproduced by permission of the artist.

#### Lights, Camera, Action...Or Should I Say Lights, Camera, Spin

The drone of an industrial setting overwhelms the ears and accompanies a dark, concrete, cave-like setting where metal rods jut out towards the viewer. In the opening shot of a two-minute film clip where tramline scratching<sup>2</sup> jumps across the screen, the vertical folds of a wall of corrugated galvanized iron take up a quarter of the shot. Behind it sits a roaring, volcano-like structure, and to the left, standing in profile is the hero of this story wearing a blue headband with white wings.<sup>3</sup> Could the hero be a reinterpretation of the Greek god Hermes, the trickster god of transition and boundaries, protector and patron of invention, who, as a winged psychopomp, could move quickly and freely between worlds?<sup>4</sup> This shaggy-haired, bearded Hermes is dressed in a brown V-neck shirt and bell-bottom jeans signalling his membership in 1970s Canadian counter culture. The

story begins when the hero pushes, with help of his blow pipe, a heavy, fireproof door—reminiscent of a stage curtain—to reveal a glowing, golden-yellow, barrel-vaulted doorway which leads into the belly of a miniature volcano. Those three jutting metal rods, one blowpipe and two pontils, now draw a line directly from the viewer into the furnace.



**Figure 103** Still photograph from a 2 minute film of Marty Kaufman blowing glass at the Alberta College of Art (ACA), c. 1979 by the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT). Reproduced by permission of the artist.

The film cuts to a sequence where the hero, Marty Kaufman, blows a glass vessel. Kaufman reaches on tiptoe into the depths of the volcano/furnace and gathers upon his blowpipe viscous, molten glass (fig. 102). As soon as Kaufman pulls the honey-like substance out of the volcano, he begins turning his blowpipe in order to keep the glass from oozing off. In a sequence of close-up shots, which fetishize the glowing, red-hot glass, Kaufman is seen constantly spinning the material on the marver and at the bench in order to shape the glass. Kaufman then rises and returns to the furnace in order to flash/reheat the parison, the rounded gather of molten glass on the end of the blow pipe. At this moment, the viewpoint changes, and the viewer becomes the glass, peering out from behind the corrugated iron curtain at the psychopomp/glass artist who will guide the viewer from the fiery depths of the furnace. The film cuts to a close up of the reheated parison, now outside the furnace, turning and expanding on the end of the blowpipe and continues with a close-up profile shot of Kaufman's face as he uses his breath to expand the form. Only the top portion of the pipe is visible, stressing the importance of Kaufman's actions of constantly turning the blowpipe while also creating a very personal

connection between the material and himself through breath (fig. 103). Then, the camera angle changes with the parison being thrust directly in front of the viewer, forcing the direction of the gaze to travel directly down the shaft of the constantly turning blow pipe towards the glassblower. Kaufman then removes the pipe from his mouth, and as the shot changes to a full view of Kaufman with almost all the accoutrements of the glassblowing studio visible, he proceeds to take the constant spinning, twirling and twisting movements of the glass blower to a new level by spinning the entire blowpipe in a giant circular motion in front of him (fig. 104). Curiously, the film clip ends with a quick changing of the soundtrack to what sounds like breaking glass and a couple seconds of Kaufman holding and examining the completed vessel in his gloved hand.



**Figure 104** Still photograph from a 2 minute film of Marty Kaufman blowing glass at the Alberta College of Art (ACA), c. 1979 by the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT). Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Why have I decided to dedicate the first section of this chapter to a description of a short film which gives a step-by-step account of the glassblowing process that takes place in a small studio? Is this not supposed to be a chapter about early studio glass in the Prairie provinces (late 1960s through the 1970s) which would mean identifying, listing, and canonizing “key figures,” such as Sheridan College School of Crafts and Design’s Robert Held and Daniel Crichton (1946–2002); L’Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières’ Gilles Désaulniers; Alberta College of Arts’ (ACA) Norman Faulkner; Ontario College of Arts’ Karl Schantz; and Centre des Métiers de Verre du Québec/Espace Verre’s François Houdé (1950–1993), and glassblowing programs across Canada as I did in a 2008 essay titled “Passing the Torch: Four Canadian Studio Glass Educators”?<sup>5</sup> The



history of studio glass<sup>6</sup> is often dominated by this genealogical approach, but in this chapter, I will—while acknowledging its usefulness as a starting point—turn away from this family tree-like logic in order to examine why “studio glass” in the Prairie provinces developed when it did. By metaphorically spinning and shattering glass’ genealogical dependent narrative with a focus on material and process in relation to Roger Caillois’ sociology of play andilinx and Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov’s design-based concept of the blobject, I am taking a craft-based—and more specifically a glass-based—approach to the history of Canadian glass. Bruce Metcalf stated in a 2009 lecture, “Glass was an icon of modernity to early 20<sup>th</sup> century architects, particularly in Germany. To them, the building of the future would be transparent and visually weightless, made entirely of glass. I have yet to see a studio glass artist address this history.”<sup>7</sup> I would argue it was addressed by early studio glass blowers in a very real way through vertiginous **play** during the making process and the development and celebration of an aesthetic which **destroys the stability** of modernism’s idea for the future of glass (transparent and visually weightless) and embraces a “tune in” and “drop out” approach to Canadian counter cultural social experiments in **individual liberation**, **improvisation**, and **collective passion** which in turn prefigure the technological, organic, and optimistic blobject.

This glass-based approach to studying early studio glass has enabled me to analyse and think about glass in broader terms, from craft- and glass-based perspectives, rather than an art-based perspective rooted in canons, genealogy, and mythic tales which perpetuate the false binary of studio versus factory-made glass. In turn, this approach has enabled me to build the argument that studio glass developed when it did in the Prairie provinces because its playful,ilinx-like nature complemented the culture of the time: *studio* glassblowing represented a concerted shift in the approach to the material, and this new approach was a reflection of the times in Canada and the United States which made the actions and subsequent objects appealing to a variety of people.

### **Just Add Glass and Spin...Problems with a Genealogical Based Canon**

While further along in this chapter I will push the genealogical approach to the side, there are some benefits to knowing a bit about the makers in question, and therefore it is useful

to quickly spinoff towards a genealogy. If I was in this chapter to take a genealogical approach and apply it to Kaufman, I would state that Kaufman was part of the first graduating glass class at the Alberta College of Art (ACA, now Alberta University of the Arts, AUArts).<sup>8</sup> He studied glass and sculpture at ACA from 1977 to 1981 under the tutelage of Norman Faulkner.<sup>9</sup> Faulkner set up the glassblowing facilities within the ceramics department at ACA in 1975. Continuing this ascending genealogical approach, Faulkner was introduced to glass while attending the 1972 Mark Peiser workshop with Clark Guettel (1949–2011) at Sheridan College School of Crafts and Design (now Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning). Peiser attended two glass sessions in the summer of 1967 at the Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina and within the year became the first glass resident craftsman.<sup>10</sup> I can complicate this American/Canadian connection through Peiser by adding that Robert Held, the founder of Sheridan’s glass program who later in 1978 founded Skookum Art Glass Inc. in Calgary, attended a Peiser workshop at Penland in 1968.<sup>11</sup> Now to step back another generation, Penland’s glass studio was set up in 1965 by Bill Boysen who was, at that time, a graduate student of Harvey Littleton (1922–2013).<sup>12</sup> Here is where the genealogy of studio glass in North America begins with a “founding father” and a “big bang” theory: Littleton and the Toledo Workshop of March 23, 1962.<sup>13</sup> In the end, through this approach, Kaufman connects back to Harvey Littleton, legitimizing Kaufman’s practice as well as the other glass-related activities in Alberta, but what has this exercise revealed about the Kaufman video, his work or studio glass in general? Not much.



**Figure 105** Mallorytown Glass Works, *Carafe*, 1839–1840. Free-blown pale green glass, lily pad pattern, with pontil mark, 23.0 cm high. Collection: Canadian Museum of History, D-8605, S94-15393. Reproduced by permission of the Canadian Museum of History.

This top down/bottom up approach to constructing a history of glass in Canada and the United States creates canons. There are advantages to canonization: mainly it offers a starting point that can then be shattered or reformulated, and it is an ideal method for recording factual information in order to understand the connections between people and various styles.<sup>14</sup> Like my essay “Passing the Torch: Four Canadian Studio Glass Educators,” curator Rosalyn J. Morrison’s catalogue, *Canadian Glassworks 1970–1990* also presents a “genealogy” in the form of a chart that looks very much like a family tree, and the accompanying two essays also canonize a number of individuals.<sup>15</sup> Yet Morrison’s work has proven to be invaluable to my research in terms of identifying key individuals and the roles they played within the history of Canadian studio glass. Both of these glass-related projects, my chapter on studio glass pioneers in Canada and Morrison’s survey text, mimic the approach some early revisionist feminist art historians took when advocating for a greater number of women to be included in art historical survey texts and art exhibitions: if women are missing from the canon, simply insert them, and if glass is missing from the canon, simply insert it, or if it is missing its own history, then research the genealogy and record it using the same logic as the histories which have excluded glass in the first place. In *Art Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Cynthia Freeland calls this approach the “add women and stir” approach, and it is easy to see how “Passing the Torch: Four Canadian Studio Glass Educators” could be described as an “add glass artists and stir” approach to writing a history on Canadian studio glass.<sup>16</sup> However, adding and stirring does not make visible—nor does it change or undermine—the factors that enabled those omissions to happen in the first place. Adopting the same methodologies and logic used when canon forming to create other canons only replicates biases and power imbalances and privileges certain types of objects over others. Freeland states:

Feminists criticize canons because they enshrine traditional ideas about what makes for ‘greatness’ in art, literature, music, etc; and this ‘greatness’ always seems to exclude women...Canons are described as ‘Ideologies’ or belief systems that falsely pretend to objectivity when they actually reflect the power and dominance relations (in this case, the power relations of patriarchy).<sup>17</sup>

In addition to perpetuating biases, power imbalances, omissions, and a false sense of objectivity, the genealogical and add glass and stir approaches do nothing to foster an

understanding of the objects themselves in relation to broader social and craft-related issues and do not encourage scholars to ask important questions as genealogy focuses on straight lines rather than broader, more complicated web-like questions. For example, a broader question might be to try and decipher what role the G.I. Bill played in the academicization of craft and the development of studio glass. Harvey Littleton took advantage of the G.I. Bill when he returned from the Second World War.<sup>18</sup> In the United States, the G.I. Bill granted free education to 16 million Second World War veterans, but only 350,000 were women.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, right from the start of the studio glass movement, which developed first in the United States, there is an overarching power structure benefitting certain types of people over others.



**Figure 106** Ione Thorkelsson, *Vase*, 1974. Light blue batch (window glass with cobalt added), thread (aluminum foil), 18.0 x 14.5 cm. Collection: Private. Photo: Ione Thorkelsson. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

This “add glass artists and stir” approach has also led to a male-dominated history privileging certain techniques and objects over others. In some cases, genealogical lineage trumps the object; if a glass “artist” can trace their roots back to a founding father, the big bang or an important educational institution, they make it into the history books no matter the quality of their artistic output. British Columbia scholar Catherine Siermacheski pointed out in her 2011 lecture “Analyzing Gender Representation of Glass Artists in Museums and Gallery Catalogues” there is a gender imbalance within the

history and discourse of glass; although art galleries and museums have inclusive mandates, “women glass artists are under-represented in exhibitions and collections of contemporary arts and crafts.”<sup>20</sup> In addition, the canonization of certain glass artists (using a genealogical approach mixed with a bit of art and craft history and all the biases that come along with those fields) has also led to a fractured, uncritical history of Canadian glass where objects made in a factory setting (fig. 105) are somehow seen as separate and “un-craft-like” compared to those made in a studio setting (fig. 106). Another imbalance can be seen in the division between the functional vessel and the glass sculpture. Over and over again, glass sculpture is featured more prevalently than functional glass: The Saidye Bronfman Award—Canada’s highest award for fine craft—has been awarded to four glass sculptors and only one vesselist;<sup>21</sup> Morrison’s survey text features the sculptural work of Jim Norton (1957–2016) over his production vessels and also highlights nine other sculptors and only three vessel makers;<sup>22</sup> and the 2011 exhibition catalogue *Glass Factor: Luminaries in the Canadian Art Glass Scene* features 16 sculptors and only two vessel makers.<sup>23</sup> Most revealing is the 1987 exhibition catalogue *Art Glass of Canada* which claims to “show a cross-section of glass, from vessel forms to sculpture,”<sup>24</sup> but includes only four vessel makers compared to 13 sculptors. The accompanying essay justifies this imbalance while also indicating a curatorial bias towards art and “fine” craft: “the majority of the artists presented in this exhibition learned the technical aspects of their medium while studying and producing vessel forms in school. Only a few, however, honing their skills and exploring new avenues of interpretation to such an extent that their oeuvre must fairly be viewed on a higher plane than mere craft.”<sup>25</sup>

If I am truly interested in glass, why have I accepted and perpetuated the genealogical approach? Why have I turned a blind eye to pieces made in a factory, and why is there such a focus on sculpture over the vessel? If two pieces of glass move me and do what glass does best: eating, transmitting, and reflecting light;<sup>26</sup> celebrating the hollow, buoyant, gravity-defying, breath-formed vessel;<sup>27</sup> falling into the matrix of time, self reflection, desire, and world creation;<sup>28</sup> engaging with glass’ particular history (this includes its relationship to decoration); demonstrating technical virtuosity or a negation of it and reveling in or dismissing the beautiful and alluring qualities of the medium

itself,<sup>29</sup> does it matter the type of building where the piece was made or if it has somehow transcended the plane of “mere craft”? For art history professor Ezra Shales, who adopts a craft-based approach in his book *The Shape of Craft*, it does not, as he states that glass “has always been industrial manufacture in the best and most accurate manner.”<sup>30</sup> Up until now, my understanding of glass has reflected the fine craft and studio craft stereotype that the factory glass blower is incapable of creative output while the studio glass blower, with a lineage that traces back to the Venetian “masters” and the Toledo Workshop, only creates works full of personal expression and concept and never panders to the decorative whims of the marketplace. This bias and over-reliance on a genealogical approach within the history of studio glass in Canada is exactly why a glass-based approach to the study of glass is needed as it approaches glass from a glass perspective and makes room for women, factory work, and various other glass-related activities such as the Kaufman film.

### **Myth Making in Canadian Glass History**

In her 1971 essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists,” Linda Nochlin explains the ramifications of an approach which celebrates founding fathers and big bang theories but does not ask important questions:

The magical aura surrounding the representational arts and their creators has, of course, given birth to myths since the earliest times. Interestingly enough, the same magical abilities attributed by Pliny to the Greek sculptor Lysippos in antiquity—the mysterious inner call in early youth, the lack of any teacher but Nature herself—is repeated as late as the 19th century...The supernatural powers of the artist as imitator, his control of strong, possibly dangerous powers, have functioned historically to set him off from others as a godlike creator, one who creates Being out of nothing... Yet it is this sort of mythology about artistic achievement and its concomitants which forms the unconscious or unquestioned assumptions of scholars, no matter how many crumbs are thrown to social influences, ideas of the times, economic crises, and so on.<sup>31</sup>

The Kaufman film, while cheekily nodding towards mythology, is an excellent starting point into developing a glass and craft-centered discourse that moves beyond myth and “just add glass artists and stir,” in order to problematize the false binary of the studio versus the factory and to answer broader questions such as why did studio glass develop when it did on the prairies.

While I have, whenever possible, included both female and male identifying glass-blowers in the various points and examples I am making (with a focus on Thorkelsson and Kaufman found throughout the entire chapter), the genealogical-based history and historic factory examples reflect the male dominated world of glass-blowing at the time. The goal of this chapter is not to rewrite what has historically been a masculine-centric area of production (blowing glass) but rather to understand how the same values that worked to uphold the “lone male artistic genius” in the art world transferred into the narrative of the history of studio glass and its accompanying genealogy filled with heroic male blowers with magic-like powers. Following that, the second goal of this chapter is to propose an alternative way to think about glass.

Consider Nochlin’s quote in relation to the Kaufman film which depicts a heroic figure forming, as if through the power of magic, a vessel out of a dangerous molten lava-like substance, and it is easy to fall into mythologizing early studio glassblowers who built their own equipment, formulated unique glass batch, and taught themselves how to blow glass. However, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, the Kaufman film can also be used as an entry point into a different way to approach and understand glass, one that does not privilege the genius but instead looks at material, process, and social context.

Breaking the rules, experimentation, perseverance, and making something out of nothing can all be used to describe the zeitgeist of early studio glass production. These attitudes, while upholding the tropes of the “lone male artistic genius,” created an approach and environment to studio glassblowing which privileged experimentation but in turn eclipsed and pushed to the side the amateur do-it-yourself (DIY) aesthetic associated with women’s production of other crafts and factory glass production. Littleton’s well known assertion from the early 1970s, “Technique is cheap”—as quoted in glass scholar Dan Klein’s book *Glass: A Contemporary Art*—speaks to this mindset.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the outsider nature of studio glass from the art world created a scenario which allowed for a DIY aesthetic and DIY mode of production that was not dependent on, and even rejected, glass-related expertise such as the knowledge and skill found within glassblowing factories. This DIY aesthetic (the blob-like quality of early studio glass) set it apart from factory-made glass, and consequently early studio glass occupied a

kind of liminal space between the celebration of the male genius and the erasure of skilled craft practices. The discourse of glass, to this day, celebrates and perpetuates this liminal space occupied by mythic heroes.

During the course of researching this chapter, over and over again I read about the mythic big bang moment of the Toledo workshop and Littleton's god-like involvement. Klein opens the introduction to his book with: "It is now nearly thirty years since that momentous seminar of 1962...during which a way was found of melting glass in a furnace small enough to be used away from the confines of industry. 'The glass workshop of 1962 was probably as significant a moment in the history of glass as the time when glass was first blown.'"<sup>33</sup> Corning Museum of Glass includes Dominick Labino (1910–1987)—who was enlisted to help with the technical aspects—in their big bang description:

Harvey Littleton is internationally acclaimed and recognized for his tireless work in founding and promoting the American Studio Glass movement. The movement was "born" in 1962, during two seminal glassblowing workshops at The Toledo Museum of Art. The workshops were led by Littleton, a Cranbrook-trained ceramist and professor at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and Dominick Labino, a glass research scientist at the Johns-Manville plant near Toledo, Ohio. The aim of the workshops was to introduce artists to the use of hot glass as a material for contemporary art.<sup>34</sup>

The magazine *American Craft* describes the 1962 workshop just as dramatically: "Today Littleton is hailed as the 'father' of the glass movement that has since flourished internationally. As for the now-mythic Toledo workshops, they are to studio glass roughly what the Wright Brothers' flight at Kitty Hawk is to modern aviation."<sup>35</sup> To top it off however, one of the most theatrical genealogical descriptions is found in a 2012 newspaper article published in *The Blade*:

At the heart of its beginnings is a man with an insatiable curiosity for glass, stemming, no doubt, from his father, a scientist who developed Pyrex in 1915 and often took his boy to work with him at Corning Glass Works. The son, Harvey Littleton, disappointed his father by not becoming a physicist. He wanted to make beautiful objects from glass, which his father insisted could not be done by an individual in a studio. Glass, he said, could only be made by a team of skilled craftsmen working in huge factory furnaces capable of generating tremendous heat. The technology simply did not exist.



Inhabited by an artistic soul, young Littleton went on to study the next closest thing: ceramics, though he remained forever fascinated by glass.<sup>36</sup>

Although seven students officially signed up for the course and a number of others joined in unofficially, it is exceptionally difficult to track down their names as more often than not the sources mention only a few or none at all.<sup>37</sup> In Patricia Failing's chapter "Studio Glass, 1945–1969," the participants are listed, but tucked away in an endnote: Clayton Bailey (1939–2020), Edith Franklin (1922–2012), Frances Higgins (1912–2004), Michael Higgins (1908–1999), Carl Martz, John Stephenson (1929–2015), Tom McGlauchlin (1934–2011), and Dora Reynolds (dates unknown).<sup>38</sup> Surprisingly, even in this small group, 43% were women but their participation is basically left out of the record in favour of mythic moments and acts of male artistic genius. When they are mentioned, as Co-Founder of the Toledo Potter's Guild and well-respected potter Edith Franklin is, it is in relation to Littleton and reads as something out of an outdated art history textbook. In *The Blade* article, Franklin is described as "an Ottawa Hills wife and mother who had taken Mr. Littleton's clay classes at the museum a decade earlier."<sup>39</sup> Also in 2012, Isabella Webbe writing for *Urban Glass* makes a point of describing her glass objects from the 1962 workshop that were donated to the Toledo Museum of Art as "rare relics of the humble beginnings from which the international Studio Glass Movement developed" but then goes on to say that "The other five [glass objects] are from artist Edith Franklin who at the time the workshop took place was already an exhibited artist in her own right. Though she continued to work in ceramics, her work has been called 'striking similar' to that of Littleton and McGlauchlin."<sup>40</sup> Therefore, even within studio glass' recent discourse, the blob-like amateur objects continue to be celebrated but in relation to mythic men and their break from factory processes and aesthetics. Granted, a number of these sources have started to flesh out studio glass' history before 1962 and do mention the contributions of Labino and other industrial glassblowers to the Toledo Workshop including Littleton's own industrial glass past, but the lack of inclusivity, the genealogic mindset, the myth-making rhetoric, and the false binary between studio and factory remains strong, illustrating the pitfalls Nochlin warns about and making visible the necessity for a new way to discuss, examine, and think about glass.<sup>41</sup>

Within the Canadian context, the division between studio and industrial glass is also prevalent leading to a story where the genius of early studio glass artists enabled them to discover the nearly “lost” or “unknown” craft of glassblowing and to build their equipment out of virtually nothing or at least all by themselves. For example, in the Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies of the National Museum of Man’s (now Canadian Museum of History) publication *Works of Craft from the Massey Foundation Collection*, it states: “By the end of the nineteenth century, glassworks had been established in Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia. However, it was not long before most standard glassware was made by machine, and the craft of forming glass by hand survived in the work of only a few specialists.”<sup>42</sup> Siermacheski states “[Martha] Henry did her early training at Sheridan College in 1971, while the program was in its infancy, with instructor Robert Held, the American ceramist who helped establish the first glassblowing program in Canada. Henry related her experiences at Sheridan where they built their own glass furnaces.”<sup>43</sup> Henry was the first woman to set up an independent production studio in Calgary and therefore has an important backstory and lineage.<sup>44</sup> However, Siermacheski does not mention Held’s contact with and support from Consumers Glass factory in Toronto during those early days at Sheridan.<sup>45</sup> Needless to say, the development of studio glass in Canada is connected to industry, and glass was first blown in Canada in factories such as Mallorytown Glass Works in Ontario.<sup>46</sup>

The mythic tale of the birth of Canadian studio glass tells of when, in 1969, Held turned on the furnaces at Sheridan College—another big bang moment.<sup>47</sup> Note Morrison’s description in relation to big bang moments, mythmaking, and division between factory blown glass and studio glassblowing:

Prior to his arrival in Canada, Held had been inspired by the roar and red-hot aura surrounding the glass furnaces during a visit to the studios at a college in Long Beach, California. He was hooked. He attempted to institute a glass department at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles where he was a ceramics teaching assistant, but the university rejected his proposal.

He brought his idea north and, as ceramics instructor at Sheridan College, participated in an intensive workshop with Mark Peiser at Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina in 1968. His fight to establish the first glassblowing programme in Canada, at Sheridan, proved successful. In the seventies, the first decade of studio glass in Canada, efforts concentrated on exploring very basic ways of making glass and its rudimentary manipulation. Glassblowers during this

time, without a living tradition to teach them sophisticated craft skills, found that the nature of glass often dictated form.

In this initial period, many technical details needed to be addressed. The difference between the glasshouses of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and contemporary glass studios was the new need for a comparatively small furnace design and for recipes of raw materials or cullet that could be melted in small quantities. Fortunately, by 1968, many of the conversion obstacles encountered during the seminal 1962 workshops in Toledo, Ohio, masterminded by Harvey Littleton and Dominick Labino, had been resolved.<sup>48</sup>

What this mythic tale does not explain is why studio glass took hold and spread to numerous other institutions in Canada and matured into a legitimate and dynamic form of creative expression. It also others, or sets aside, factory made blown glass which was still being blown in Alberta with companies such as Altaglass (1950–1988), a company which will be discussed shortly. As Nochlin warned, the larger questions have been left unasked in favour of the mythic stories with genealogical foundations. Embracing a glass-based approach to the study of early Prairie studio glass brings me back to Kaufman’s mythic tale/film, which was made approximately 10 years after Held turned on the furnaces in Toronto. Unlike the dangerous type of myth described by Nochlin, I will wallow in this mythic tale (actually, I already accomplished this in the opening paragraphs of this paper), and then take the vertiginous play seen throughout Kaufman’s contemporary mythic tale, replete with a trickster who specializes in guiding people between two worlds (something glass also facilitates through the use of lenses, mirrors, screens, and windows), and use it as an entry point into developing a viscous approach to glass and the glass/craft demonstration where there is room to examine the object, the maker, process/technique, and other broader social implications. With this approach, when something was made, who made it, and how they are related to a founding father is as important as what that piece of material culture has to say. Sociologist Tim Dant states in *Material Culture in the Social World*, “The things we make, appropriate and use are a manifestation of social forms while also shaping them. This is the idea that I want to develop with the concept of *material culture*; not only are things our products, designed to help us fulfil basic animal needs, but also they are an expression of who and what we are that shapes how society can proceed.”<sup>49</sup> Early studio glass is exactly that: an expression of societal norms and upheavals of the time.

### Hot Dang It's Playtime

After I saw Kaufman/Hermes playfully face the camera, then spin his blow pipe/caduceus around in a circle (fig. 104) and heard a lecture by film gaming theorist David Surman on “Videogames and the Neo-Baroque,”<sup>50</sup> I came to realize how sociologist Roger Caillois’ game theory and in particular his fourth rubric of play, *ilinx* (vertiginous play),<sup>51</sup> can be used to address glass and early Canadian studio glass on its own terms because blowing glass or working with glass in the hot shop, no matter the time period, requires a constant spinning motion.

In his book *Man, Play and Games*, Caillois defines *ilinx*-type games as those “based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. In all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness.”<sup>52</sup> He adds, “*ilinx* presume[s] a world without rules in which the player constantly improvises.”<sup>53</sup> Games of vertigo “demand an effervescence and collective passion to sustain and encourage the intoxication they produce.”<sup>54</sup> Examples of *ilinx*-type play include tobogganing, dance, high speed skiing, driving motorcycles and/or cars, swinging, and tightrope walking.<sup>55</sup> According to Caillois, *ilinx* is the Greek word for whirlpool.<sup>56</sup> It is evident in the deliciously seductive and evocatively expressive examples of early studio glass, with thick undulating rims and an unapologetic push-pull between working with the material and learning from the material. *Vase*, 1974 (fig. 106) by Ione Thorkelsson, who attended summer courses at Sheridan in 1973 and 1976 and has been operating a one-woman studio in a renovated chicken coop in rural southern Manitoba since 1973, is an example of early Canadian and Prairie studio glass because it embraces the marks of vertiginous play through the elongated bubbles and spiraling thread of an applied aluminum foil-like substance found within the glass and the poetic undulation to the lip which resists the clean, organized lines found in the international modernist aesthetic.<sup>57</sup>

Caillois seeks to define and classify the games people play from the attitude of the player.<sup>58</sup> This approach to understanding games fits nicely when examining Kaufman and any other studio glassblower because their approach to the material is different from

somebody who is only interested in using glass for certain projects rather than striving to create an intimate, long-term working relationship with the material and specialized techniques.<sup>59</sup> American craft theorist Glenn Adamson states in his book *Thinking Through Craft* that craft “always entails an encounter with the properties of a specific medium.”<sup>60</sup> I find Adamson’s statement useful for my own understanding of the connection between craft and material: craft is a sustained engagement on a physical and metaphorical level with materials and the subsequent discipline-related constraints associated with those materials. In order to understand and study craft, one must study materials and one’s relationship to them. While Kaufman’s film is not a glass object, his approach to the material, mainly through the demonstration of various vertiginous techniques, engages with and highlights the concerted shift in the approach to glass that occurred in the late 1960s and 1970s and the engagement with the disciplinary constraints of glassblowing, making it an important part of Canadian and Prairie glass history.



**Figure 107** Ione Thorkelsson, *Plate*, 1978. Glass, approx. 2.3 x 24.8 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Although Kaufman makes glassblowing look easy, there is a tenuous balance, a push-pull, between play, learning, and serious making. Throughout the film, Kaufman demonstrates impressive skills, and the camera focuses on tools. This is all done while Kaufman is ever so slightly in costume (the winged headband). Kaufman stated in a 2013 interview that the studio at the time was very small and hot which necessitated some type of head gear in order to keep the sweat out of the eyes. The wings on his headband did not have any specific meaning but were simply “a funky thing to wear. It fit the zeitgeist of the time.”<sup>61</sup> Dant points out when examining the vertiginous play of windsurfing sailors that play happens when the sailors adopt roles they do not follow in non-leisure

time.<sup>62</sup> While Hermes' wings might have simply been an expression of the time, they also serve as a visual marker of the playful approach of early studio glass.

Caillois outlines six essential qualities of play: free (play is not compulsory), separate (bounded within clearly pre-defined limits of time and space), uncertain (results cannot be determined beforehand), unproductive (no goods or wealth are created), governed by rules (ordinary laws are suspended and replaced with new ones), and make-believe (the presence of a second reality).<sup>63</sup> He asserts: "A characteristic of play is that it creates no wealth or goods, thus differing from work or art...Play is an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often of money."<sup>64</sup> This definition is too limiting and risks creating a false binary where play is wasteful and work is productive. Play is more complicated than that as interactive play allows for socialization with others<sup>65</sup> while solitary play allows for self discovery and is necessary for maintaining mental health and therefore is not a pure waste. Play, in the context of this chapter, is a culturally significant activity which allows people to engage with materials outside of strict conventions and to navigate and give meaning to the world around them. I want to be very clear here. When I use the word "play" in relation to any type of craft, I am not infantilizing craft or denigrating it to some type of waste-of-time activity:ilinx related play, whether in the hot shop or pottery studio, requires a sophisticated, culturally shaped push-pull-spin. Sometimes, "wasting time" can be the most productive thing to do, especially when working outside the confines of rules and societal norms.

Although Caillois posits play as an unproductive waste of time (as already stated I find this understanding to be too narrow and dangerously close to forming a binary), early studio glass blowers wallowed in his notion of unproductivity because, in a number of instances, they were not being paid to blow glass (they were practicing ceramists or ceramic instructors<sup>66</sup>), and their primary purpose for using glass was not to make objects to sell. Klein states during the early years of studio glass in the United States there was "little interest in commercial gain."<sup>67</sup> The same can be said for the Canadian story. In a 2011 lecture, Thorkelson stated: "The earliest pieces...represent to me the most perfect expression of what the early Studio Glass Movement was about and how I felt about the material. It was the molten transparency that captivated me and my objective at the time was nothing more than to play with this marvellous stuff."<sup>68</sup> This playful approach is

particularly visible in a circa 1978 plate where dramatic splashes of colour ooze through the translucent object (fig. 107), a 1974 vase where a silver nitrate thread spirals up and around the form (fig. 108), and in a 1973 Sphere where bubbles are seen throughout the piece (fig. 109).



**Figure 108** Ione Thorkelsson, *Vase*, 1974. Light blue batch (window glass with cobalt added), silver nitrate thread. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

“Playing” with glass was also another way to express the zeitgeist of the time—a “tune in” and “drop out” approach to Canadian counter cultural social experiments in individual liberation, improvisation, and collective passion. For example, Norman Faulkner was initially hired as a ceramics instructor at ACA but simultaneously developed a glass practice; he set up his own glass studio in Calgary prior to joining the faculty at ACA.<sup>69</sup> Presumably, his paycheck as an ACA ceramics instructor freed (Caillois’ first principle of play) him from having to blow glass that would easily sell. As head of the ceramics department at Sheridan, Held made all his third year students take a glassblowing class.<sup>70</sup> Imagine being a student thinking you were coming to class to learn how to throw clay on the wheel and instead you found yourself “dropping out” and “tuning in” to something else. This something else took place in an “other” space (Caillois’ second principle of play) within the ceramics department and the activities you did in that other space did not satisfy the learning outcomes of a ceramics course—in

relation to ceramics, they were unproductive (Caillois' fourth principle of play). The playful, unproductive (but only unproductive in relation to the rules set out by others), experimental activities of this passionate collective of “ceramic” students stuck it to the “man” running the ivory tower by asserting individual agency to the educational experience.



**Figure 109** Ione Thorkelsson, *Sphere* (A0048), 1973. Glass, 16 x 17 diam. cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

According to Caillois, “play is a separate occupation, carefully isolated from the rest of life and engaged with precise limits of time and place.”<sup>71</sup> Although the hot shop as separate space with delimited time is one avenue to take, I would be remiss if I wrote a chapter about early studio glass on the Canadian Prairies and did not mention the tremendous impact Expo 67 had on the development of glass in Canada. In fact, Caillois’ quote could be used to describe the experience of Expo 67: it took place within a precisely demarcated amount of time, April 27 to October 29, and the dream-like visual extravaganza was isolated from the rest of the world due to its location on enlarged and/or man-made islands. A make-believe world (Caillois’ sixth principle of play) was created with gimmicks such as the Expo 67 passports issued to visitors upon arrival.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, not only was the Expo 67 experience a playful one, it also was an ilinx-filled phantasmagoric experience with pavilions such as the National Film Board of Canada’s *Labyrinth* where visitors meandered through destabilizing, perspectiveless corridors made of glass floors, ceilings and walls and were elevated high in the air in order to view images on two 60 foot screens—one directly in front and one right below.<sup>73</sup> Remember,



one of the hallmarks of *ilinx* is that it is a momentary destruction of the stability of perception. Returning to the hero of our story, the scale and the modernist architecture had an impact on Kaufman when he visited Expo 67 with his family as a young boy: “I remember the Geodesic domes. That’s what I recollect the most...I was fairly amazed by the whole thing.”<sup>74</sup>

There were a number of examples of glass all mixed up in the *ilinx*-filled, otherworldly, modern experience of Expo 67.<sup>75</sup> Arts professors Rhona Richman Kenneally and Johanne Sloan explain in “Introduction: Dusting Off the Souvenir”: “The Czechoslovakia pavilion, for instance, became an extremely popular venue because of its experimental cinematic multi-screen projections, but also due to its displays of centuries-old traditions of glassware and puppetry; in such instances it seemed as if the modern and the traditional could be seamlessly reconciled.”<sup>76</sup> A number of Canadian glass blowers have expressed how influential their visit to the Czechoslovakia pavilion was. François Houdé recounts: “I was first exposed to glass during Montreal’s 1967 World’s Fair. I was extremely impressed by the glass exhibit of the Czechoslovakian pavilion. This is where the dream started. One day I would become a glass artist.”<sup>77</sup> For Gilles Désaulniers, the *ilinx*-filled adventure to the pavilion convinced him to go to Prague and learn more about glass.<sup>78</sup> Thorkelsson recalls: “The large contemporary cast sculptures of [Stanislav] Libenský (1921–2002) and [Jaroslava] Brychtová were revelatory. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine anyone could do something like that, in particular the uninhibited use of the material.”<sup>79</sup> The Czechoslovakia pavilion demonstrated to Houdé, Désaulniers, and Thorkelsson that modernism’s ideal future for glass, filled with transparency and visual weightlessness, was not the only course glass could take; it could be a whirlwind experience as well. What makes the collective, cultural phenomenon of Expo 67 and the Czechoslovakia pavilion important in terms of why studio glass took hold in Canada when it did was that what the visitors experienced at Expo 67 was similar to what early glass blowers experienced in the hot shop: *ilinx*.

### **Playing Around with Glass’ Craft-Related History and the False Binary**

Recognizing productive glass-related *ilinx* play enables me to trouble the false binary of factory versus studio glass and to demythologize the notion that glassblowing was a lost

art and was not being blown in Western Canada when the studio glass movement took hold in the late 1960s. When the binary is at play, there is no room to consider the similarities, both aesthetic and play-related, between Mallorytown Glass Works' *Carafe*, 1834–1845 (fig. 105) and Thorkelsson's *Vase*, 1974 (fig. 106) or between Thorkelsson's *Vase* and an Altaglass *Vase*, 1960–1969 (fig. 110). Yet the combination of the concept ofilinx related play and a glass-centered approach to the history of Canadian glass, opens the history and troubles binaries and myths. With this glass-centered approach in mind, I will now explore the similarities between *Carafe* and the Thorkelsson *Vase*, made over one hundred and fifty years apart, in order to demythologize the big bang moments in studio glass and to examine how the approach to the material in both are the same yet different. In turn, this discussion will shed light on why studio glass took hold when it did in the Prairie provinces in Canada.



**Figure 110** Altaglass, *Vase*, 1960-1969. Glass, 9.4 x 21.5 x 10.7 cm. Collection: Esplanade Museum, Medicine Hat, Alberta, 97.14.2. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Museum, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Glass historian Gerald Stevens hypothesizes in *Glass in Canada: The First One Hundred Years* that the production of glass in Canada was more than likely first produced at the Mallorytown Glass Works in Ontario.<sup>80</sup> The mouth-blown *Carafe* (fig. 105), attributed to the Mallorytown Glass Works, has a loose, improvisational quality to the threaded neck and lily pad decoration.<sup>81</sup> Although the *carafe*'s form is tighter and more controlled than the Thorkelsson example, both are mouth-blown and elicit the organic, amorphous, and curvaceous aesthetic of the blobject (a concept I will unpack later in this

chapter), which is one of the appealing aesthetics of handmade glass from the early days of the studio glass movement.<sup>82</sup>

It was surprising for me to discover such expressive mouth-blown glass objects in early Canadian glass history as my genealogical bias and stereotypical definition of factory-blown glass had, up until this point, prevented me from looking outside the studio. How could creative work be made in a factory where workers were required to follow specific designs? How can a glass factory have space for imagination, concept, improvisation, and play when market demands must be met? Geology professor J. Victor Owen troubles my stereotypical understanding of the factory by pointing out in “Geochemical Characterization of Alleged Mallorytown Glass (c. 1839–40) in the Royal Ontario Museum and Its Distinction from Contemporary Upstate New York Glassware” that much of the early decorative glassware that is celebrated today “was made on an *ad hoc* basis by glassblowers employed at factories that produced and sold only window panes and/or bottles...[The Redford and Redwood factories in upstate New York] are nonetheless mostly remembered today for their off-hand (‘end-of-day’) bowls and pitchers, as well as for more whimsical items such as glass canes and hats made by the glassblowers during lunchtime or as their shifts ended.”<sup>83</sup> Essentially, these factory workers were creatively engaging with process and material just as studio glass blowers continue to do today and did so in the late 1960s and 1970s when they were establishing their studios and engaging with the material. Furthermore, Owen points out how Gerald Stevens never considered in his book *Early Canadian Glass* that Mallorytown might have been a window glass factory that made containers and whimsies during off hours.<sup>84</sup> Chloe Zerwick summarises the situation in 19<sup>th</sup> century America (USA) as the same: “Tableware produced in bottle and window glass factories was usually made by the individual worker for his family and friends, often on his own time and at the end of his shift.”<sup>85</sup> Stevens includes a firsthand account of this practice of making objects outside of the factory-defined output in *Glass in Canada* in a 1958 interview with George Gardiner, who had started working at the Burlington Glass House in Hamilton, Ontario in 1885:

**Stevens:** Glass collectors are always interested in whimsies and the little special pieces that glassblowers made. When did the glassblowers find time to make pieces for themselves or their friends?

**Gardiner:** During lunch hour.

**Stevens:** They didn't do any work after hours or anything like—always during lunch hours?

**Gardiner:** Yes.<sup>86</sup>

Needless to say, in all of these examples, play and unproductive activity (in relation to the activities and goals of the factory) were present and were an important part of early glass in Canada.



**Figure 111** Burlington Glass Company, *Celery Vase*, c. 1878–1900. Glass, 15.9 x 10.1 cm. Collection: Canadian Museum of History, D-5888, S94-15378. Reproduced by permission of the Canadian Museum of History.

Although nearly all early Canadian glass was mouth-blown, it is inaccurate to claim that glassblowing continued to be a prevalent process within the factory settings of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and therefore, assertions about glassblowing being a “lost” art are somewhat true. Zerwick explains there was often a combination of a shortage of skilled glassmakers and a need for increased productivity causing factories in the United States to adopt mould-forming techniques which produced shape and surface pattern in one step.<sup>87</sup> This dramatically changed the aesthetic of the glass objects made for the home and is why Steven asserts in *Early Canadian Glass*:

As time has gone on, the needs of mass production prevail. The skilled individual in Canada, the artist with the blowpipe and the pontil rod or ‘ponty,’ has all but disappeared. Mr. E. G. Davies, manager of the Dominion Glass Company, Limited at Wallaceburg, Ontario, states in a letter to the author dated January 14, 1959: ‘There are no (glass) blowers being employed in Canada at the present time. Our last hand-blowing operation at this plant was about 1942.’”<sup>88</sup>

To compound the shift from mouth-blown to mould-made, efficiency and factory output were greatly increased with the 1820 invention of the mechanical pressing

machine which enabled two men, with limited experience and/or skill, to produce four times the amount of glass as a team of three or four trained glassblowers.<sup>89</sup> During this whole period of increased mechanization, bottles were still mouth-blown into moulds but had to have their necks and lips finished by hand; this however, changed with the 1903 invention of the automatic bottle blowing machine enabling the machine to completely take over.<sup>90</sup> Glass objects produced with these mould-formed surfaces (figs. 111 & 112) look dramatically different than mouth-blown examples such as the Mallorytown *Carafe* (fig. 105). This new type of mould-made glass filled American and Canadian homes and was even praised in publications aimed at the consumer. Zerwick quotes an early 1815 New York publication aimed at women which states, “Those who wish for Trifle dishes, better stands, &c. at a lower charge than cut glass may buy them in moulds, of which there is a great variety that looks extremely well if not placed near the more beautiful article.”<sup>91</sup>



**Figure 112** Burlington Glass Company, *Pickle Dish*, c. 1880–1890. Glass, 24.5 x 13.5 cm. Collection: Canadian Museum of History, D-12127, CD1995-0213-075. Reproduced by permission of the Canadian Museum of History.

Yet, in terms of the history of studio glass and craft, these mould-blown objects are not part of the discourse as they are deemed to be “factory made,” too kitschy, or mass produced. Design historian Penny Sparke points out in her book *As Long as It’s Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* that design reformers and early craft writers such as Charles Eastlake (1836–1906) and John Ruskin (1819–1900) developed “A picture of women and their tastes—their preoccupation with surface rather than with utility, and with the inessential rather than the essential—[which in turn] provided a broad cultural frame for

the criticisms of the nineteenth century reformers.”<sup>92</sup> Tellingly, she points out how Eastlake and Ruskin narrowed in on mould-made cut glass as an example of how a demand for shiny and showy domestic things (which they attributed to female taste) contributed to low aesthetic standards, the inferiority of British goods on the marketplace, the economic slowdown of the time, and poor working conditions within the factory.<sup>93</sup> Eastlake writes in his 1874 book *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery, and Other Details*:

Under these conditions of material, our manufacturers had recourse to moulding, pressing, cutting, and engraving,—modes of decoration which, as they were once practiced, reduced the workman to a mere machine, and left him to think of nothing but making his tumblers accurately round and his goblets perfectly symmetrical...In short, we have gradually given up the vigor of design, gradation of tone, brilliance of color, as well as the lightness and elasticity of old glass, simply for the sake of getting two sides of a decanter exactly alike, and being able to see each other clearly through the centre!<sup>94</sup>

Ruskin echoes Eastlake’s condemnation of factory produced glass in favour of the Venetian artisan in his 1890 text *The Stones of Venice*:

Our modern glass is exquisitely clear in its substance, true in its form, accurate in its cutting. We are proud of this. We ought to be ashamed of it. The old Venice glass was muddy, inaccurate in all its forms, and clumsily cut, if at all. And the old Venetian was justly proud of it. For there is this difference between the English and Venetian workman, that the former thinks only of accurately matching his patterns, and getting his curves perfectly true and his edges perfectly sharp, and becomes a mere machine for rounding curves and sharpening edges, while the old Venetian cared not a whit whether his edges were sharp or not, but he invented a new design for every glass that he made, and never moulded a handle or a lip without a new fancy in it...Choose whether you will pay for the lovely form or the perfect finish, and choose at the same moment whether you will make the worker a man or a grindstone.<sup>95</sup>

Both of these key early craft texts illustrate the false binary put in place between factory glass marketed to women destined to decorate the home and Venetian style or studio glass. Both also give the impression glassblowing, especially in the Venetian sense, was a solitary activity. Shales reminds us that “There has never been a glasshouse worked by a solitary artisan...Assistants, in the nineteenth century often children, always surrounded the lead artisan, who sat in the chair, the gaffer’s bench flanked by rails on which the blowpipe rolled.”<sup>96</sup> Ruskin and Eastlake assume the lone Venetian glassblower was free

to experiment and play with new designs, but this is conjecture. This binary of the factory worker versus the artisan is tied up with the politics of labour and gender, but it fails to take into account those moments when the factory workers did play, for example during their lunch hours.



**Figure 113** Altaglass, *Decanter*, no date. Glass, 14.5 x 9.5 x 12 cm. Collection: Esplanade Museum, Medicine Hat, Alberta, 2003.1.65. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Museum, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Considering the seismic shift of the past ten years within craft as it has moved from a field rooted in the writings of Ruskin, Eastlake, and William Morris (1834–1896) and defined by certain types of objects (mainly functional and domestic) made of specific materials (clay, glass, fibre and metal) to an active field engaged with process, materiality and engagement with the world, ilinx-related play enables the field of glass to develop an active and much more open discourse.<sup>97</sup> Ilinx connects both the Mallorytown *Carafe* (fig. 105) and the Thorkelsson *Vase* (fig. 106) as the tell-tale signs of vertiginous play are easily identified: the spiralling ribbon-like decoration, elongated blob and bubble-like shapes, and the loose improvisational aesthetic are apparent in both. Both were also made with play in mind: Thorkelsson’s objective was to play with the material and *Carafe* was more than likely made in a window glass factory during the off hours. This ilinx-inspired shift sheds light on the creativity of both the factory worker and the studio glass blower, debunking Eastlake’s and Ruskin’s narrow stereotypical view of factory-made glass as dishonest, shameful, and uninventive. In addition, it reframes their writing so that one can see they too were interested in process; they just got caught up in the factory versus studio binary. Therefore, Ruskin’s keen observation that “If the workman [glassblower]

is thinking about his edges, he cannot be thinking about his design; if of his design, he cannot think of his edges”<sup>98</sup> does apply to both the Mallorytown *Carafe* and Thorkelsson’s *Vase* as both are playing with the edges of the design and confines of the material and discipline itself.



**Figure 114** Altaglass, *Ashtray*, 1959. Glass, free form, 14.2cm length. Collection: Esplanade Museum, Medicine Hat, Alberta, 85.38.1. Photo: T. Hulit. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Museum, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

The factory versus studio binary explains why Altaglass has more often than not been left out of the discourse surrounding the history of studio glassblowing in Canada and why it is easy to get wrapped up in the mythic tale that glass wasn’t being blown in Alberta before the early 1970s. In fact, glass was being blown in Alberta as early as 1950 in a factory setting at the Medicine Hat airport and later in 1961 in a building on 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW.<sup>99</sup> This family-run company was called Altaglass, and it was in operation from 1950 to 1988.<sup>100</sup> The founders, John Furch (1896–1976), Emily Furch (1897–1987), Margarete Stagg (1925–2000), and Les Stagg (1920–1985), built their own equipment and mixed their own glass batch on a daily basis, accomplishing in the 1950s the very feats described by early studio glass practitioners in both the United States and Canada when they recount their big bang moments.<sup>101</sup> During its thirty-plus years of operation, Altaglass produced a number of different objects including hot worked vessels (bowls, vases (fig. 110), pouring vessels (fig. 113), ashtrays (fig. 114), coasters, perfume bottles, and electric lamp bases), sculptures (various animals (figs. 115, 120 & 125) and fish), paperweights, and buttons. A number of these vessels show overt signs of ilinx with whirlpool-like colour patterns (fig. 114) and elongated bubbles which appear to float up the walls of the vessels (fig. 113) or rise from within the bellies of the beasts (fig. 115).



Later due to an increase in the cost of natural gas, Altaglass switched to the manufacture of lampworked glass whimsies such as animals, people playing sports (fig. 116), ships, and wishing wells. In terms of ilinx, these are different as the spinning motion in front of the flame is not as vertiginous.<sup>102</sup> Altaglass was sold through major department stores such as The Bay and Eaton's as well as through smaller novelty shops and Altaglass' own retail store located in the factory which was considered a tourist attraction in Medicine Hat.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, unlike studio glass which is found in gallery settings or possibly in small studio shops and craft and art fairs, Altaglass objects were found in department stores and were associated with tourism and the souvenir. However, like the Mallorytown glassblowers, one-of-a-kind lunchbox items were made during Altaglass' noon hour breaks, enabling the blowers to create in a separate space and time bounded by its own rules and reality where creativity, play, and rule breaking were encouraged.<sup>104</sup>



**Figure 115** Altaglass, *Bird*, no date. Glass, 10 x 8 x 6.5 cm. Collection: Krueger Collection. Photo: Julia Krueger.



**Figure 116** Altaglass, *Tennis Player*, no date. Borosilicate glass, 14 x 7.5 x 4.5 cm. Source: Krueger Collection.

The Altglass objects themselves were destined for the home; blown in a factory by artisans who had trained in factories in Europe, marketed to tourists and the home decorator of the household, sometimes sold in department stores rather than in art galleries, and then found on numerous coffee and side tables throughout Western Canada. In a promotional Altglass pamphlet, it states: “To Canada, from the ‘Old World’ have come the Master-Craftsmen, who make this exquisite ‘blown’ glassware. Each piece is individually ‘crafted’ and the variety of color ‘tones’ and shades make it ideal for blending with traditional as well as ‘period’ furnishing” (fig. 117).<sup>105</sup> The association to the domestic sphere (which in turn relates back to female taste and modernism’s systematic denigration of it), Altglass’ marketing of their “craftsmen” as “old world” rather than innovative and trend setting, and Altglass’ direct association with the factory, facilitated the dissociation of the glass-blowing activities at Altglass—playful or not—with the history of studio glass in the Prairies. In turn, this left an opening for any number of mythic big bang events to develop.

**Altglass**  
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To Canada from the Old World came the master craftsman who make this exquisite "blown", free-formed glassware. Each piece is individually crafted and the variety of color tones and shades make it ideal for blending traditional as well as period furnishings.

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Open daily  
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**Figure 117** Freelance Photos Ltd., Altglass Brochure, May 29, 1980. Photograph. Collection: Esplanade Archives, Freelance Photos Ltd. fonds, accession number FL80-332-e. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Archives, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Although ilinx-fuelled play is evident in Altaglass, especially in examples such as *Vase* (fig. 110) where the opaque white glass acts as an illustration of the whirlwind vertiginous activities that transpired during its making in the hot shop, which make it akin to the Mallorytown and Thorkelsson examples, it also differs from them. In fact, when an Altaglass vase (fig. 110) is compared to the Thorkelsson *Vase* (fig. 106), it is striking just how refined the Altaglass example is compared to Thorkelsson's, leading one to speculate that the glassblowing skills at play in Medicine Hat were far superior to those of the early studio glass blowers who were learning how to blow glass. This speculation is backed up by the fact that several of the glass blowers at Altaglass had been trained from an early age in European factories. For example, before immigrating to Canada from Spain, Manuel Esteban (d. 1993) started working in a glass company at the age of nine and Francisco Ribas began his glass career at the age of 25.<sup>106</sup> In fact, the majority of the blowers at Altaglass came to Medicine Hat with a wealth of glass experience; the same cannot be said for the early studio glass blowers who were learning the craft as they built their hot shops. Thorkelsson recalls:

After three weeks of learning the rudiments of this brand new art form at Sheridan, I hurried home and set up my own shop.... A converted chicken coop ... very simple equipment that I built myself with no money. This couldn't be done today. My objective was nothing more than to find a way to play with this glorious material. There was no business plan, no mentor, no precedent to go by. It was all new, everything was in the process of being invented and it was all very exciting. Even the market had yet to be invented. So not knowing any better, I built this furnace—really nothing more than a brick box with a burner—threw in some scrap window glass and began blowing.<sup>107</sup>

Therefore, although the Thorkelsson and Altaglass vases are similar in the fact that they are both products of hot shop ilinx-related play—which also makes them excellent examples of historic Canadian glass—skill appears to be the defining aspect which sets them apart and may explain the difference that sometimes occurs between factory and studio glass. Skill however is misleading, as the difference has more to do with the blower's relationship to material, control, and risk.

### **Say Cheese...But Materials Don't Perform for the Camera**

Kaufman's late 1970s film demonstrates his glassblowing skills (fig. 104), engages with core glass concepts such as ilinx, and is a demonstrative performance where witnessing

the making is even more important than the objects made during the course of the film. Action over object is made clear in the concluding moments of the film when the sound of breaking glass is heard, hinting that the piece itself is no longer in existence and is not important. As this chapter is trying to identify some of the reasons why studio glassblowing took hold in Canada when it did, it is important to note that the 1970s was a time of increased interest in performance art. Performance art involves time, space, and the performer's body; glassblowing essentially has all of these. However, it is also different from performance art in that the body is not central to the performance; instead, it is the relationship between material and maker that is central. This relationship between material and maker, when witnessed by others, is akin to performance art which positions glassblowing as a kind of liminal performative practice between craft and the 1970s art world. The Kaufman film illustrates how studio glass blowers such as himself approach, for example, a craft-based demonstration or making within a hot shop. These activities are a type of performance, but they are not performance art. Instead, Thorkelsson and Kaufman riskily engage with glass and have come to understand the performativity of it.

Materials can be performative and this is especially visible and potentially useful during a demonstration such as the Kaufman film. The live demonstration is a key component of the glassblowing world as people more often than not stop to watch blowers at work. Think of tourist markets where there are glassblowers on display; Altglass was marketed as a tourist destination where visitors were able to witness live glassblowing and then purchase something from their retail section. An example of the importance of the live demonstration of glass on a much bigger scale is the 2015 Amphitheater Hot Shop by the Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, New York. Thomas Phifer and Partners and Theatre Projects Consultant transformed a historic ventilator building into a 500-seat theatre with a full 360 degree mezzanine that now hosts daily narrated live glassblowing demonstrations for museum visitors.<sup>108</sup>

Kaufman stated in a 2020 lecture that glass has its own will, and when he blows glass, he is always “navigating gravity.”<sup>109</sup> Rather than imposing his will on the material, from his early days as a glassblower, he wanted to work with the material, to navigate gravity and to embrace the spontaneity that comes along with a material-based engagement. Thorkelsson stated something along the same lines in the 1981 publication

*The Craftsman's Way: Canadian Expressions*: "I like to use just the centrifugal forces and the force of gravity. I try to form a large part of the piece that way."<sup>110</sup> It is this spontaneous and playful material-based engagement which sets the Mallorytown and Thorkelsson examples apart from Altaglass and subtly shifts the focus from object to process, a shift echoed in the ever-changing definition of craft, making studio glass' approach to making apropos for the time.

Glass can impact those using it as well as those who create objects using glass. William Warmus explains in *Fire and Form* that one of the things glass can do very well is play with perception and space through the grinding and polishing of glass into lenses.<sup>111</sup> It can transport one into a different world by looking through a telescope or microscope. It can also separate, as seen with windows, screens, and vitrines. This ability, which no other material can do as well as glass, directly links to ilinx's ability to "momentarily destroy the stability of perception."<sup>112</sup>

Materially speaking, glass is performative because, as articulated by Kaufman and Thorkelsson, under the proper circumstances, it can and will do its own thing, enacting a sense of subjectivity or performative action in the making process. This performativity impacts the maker's actions, and those actions can be based on how the maker learned to engage with the material in the first place: for example, in a glass factory where the bottom line is key and risk is highly controlled or in a ceramics studio where glass is being blown as an experimental pedagogical exercise where a certain amount of risk is welcome. In addition, the "performance" or act of glassblowing, which can take the shape of a demonstration as it does in the Kaufman film, is one where the maker engages in a performative push/pull relationship with the performativity of the materials. The push/pull relationship is a combination of the engagement with the limits and capabilities of the materials themselves and risk.

### **Risky Play and the Shattering Rise of the Individual**

How can the shattering split second ending of the Kaufman film be read? Can it be understood as an auditory nod to the risky behaviour of early studio glass blowers over the grace and certainty of the factory blowers? Or maybe it is a product of the times, the decade after the "utopic" 1960s, the 1970s with its dystopic economic crises and overall

sense of being “too late”? Or maybe, it speaks to the glass artist’s ability to shatter conventions?

In his book *The Nature and Art of Workmanship*, woodworker David Pye defines two types of workmanship: the workmanship of certainty and the workmanship of risk.<sup>113</sup> These two types of workmanship are never found in their purest forms but instead fluctuate along a continuum. The workmanship of certainty is always found in quality production and in automation. An example is putting words to paper with a printer. The workmanship of risk happens when the quality of the result is not predetermined but depends instead on the judgment, care, and dexterity of the maker. An example is putting words to paper with a pen.<sup>114</sup> Within the hot shop, certainty comes into play through the use of tools and with all of the preparation undertaken before the making even begins, and risk involves the push/pull/spin relationship the maker has to the performativity of glass. When *Carafe* (fig. 105), the Altaglass vase (fig. 110), the Thorkelsson vase (fig. 106), and the Kaufman film (fig. 104) are all compared, the makers’ relationships to risk and the performativity of glass are evident. The Altaglass object is controlled in every way and one can speculate that even when “playing” during their lunch hours, the Altaglass blowers’ locations on Pye’s workmanship continuum were closer to certainty than to risk, whereas Thorkelsson and Kaufman were closer to risk.

The Kaufman film, with the protagonist’s headband and shattering ending, playfully navigates in front of the camera the workmanship of risk and certainty. The film did not produce any glass objects and therefore could be interpreted as a waste of time. It depicts a lone glassblower in the studio engaging in risky activities (the shattering glass sounds heighten this sense of risk) that are vastly different from the factory worker who, more often than not, worked as part of a team, aligning the Kaufman film with myths of the lone artistic genius, the false binary of the studio versus factory, and with the art world’s interest with performance art at the time.

Contrast the Kaufman film to the award winning 1958 short film *Glas* by Bert Haanstra (1916–1997).<sup>115</sup> The ten-minute dialogue-free film opens with the word “glass” flashing in different languages across the screen. Then an abstract dance of glowing parisons (molten gathers of glass) float like ghostly apparitions across a blackened screen accompanied by a jazz soundtrack—a combination of pure material in visual form and

sound are at play. Like the Kaufman film, the first half of the film highlights the various steps involved in mouth blowing glass objects at the Royal Leerdam Glass Factory in Leerdam, Netherlands. While constantly spinning blowpipes, as craftsmen gather from a volcano-like furnace and then proceed to puff air over and over again through the blowpipe, there is a lyrical flowing rhythm to the sequences involving breath: blowpipe up to lips, puff, cut; blowpipe up to lips, puff, cut. Repetition is key. Whereas in the Kaufman film, pipe to lips only happens once; there is no “mass production.” Once a bubble has formed in the glass, another sequence unfolds where workmanship of risk in the form of a mould is put to use. A gaffer carefully puts the bubble into a mould and turns the hot glass while an assistant opens and closes the mould. Throughout the film, spinning and puffing are expertly edited to compliment and work with the lyrical score. Dramatic feats of skill are also highlighted as teams of blowers work together to create, for example, a large vessel, which sets alight in a dramatic fashion one of the wooden moulds. The dramatic action in the Kaufman film happens when he faces the camera and spins his blowpipe. While the flaming mould might feel like the equivalent, *Glas*' dramatic climax comes later and not through the display of skill or technique but with crisis and the sounds of breaking glass. Within the first third of the film, hot bits are attached to vessels through the skillful use of tools, plates are spun into shape, and handles are adeptly shaped. Workmanship of certainty and risk are well represented.

The mood dramatically changes at 4:55 when the industrial noises of the furnace obliterate the soothing jazz clarinet, and the screen is filled with seething hot burners being retracted out of the furnace. In this third of the film, the workmanship of certainty is at the forefront. The soundtrack changes to a syncopated electronic sound with the drone of someone counting out loud in the background, and an automatic glass bottle machine is featured. The workers in this section do not lyrically and riskily navigate heat, gravity, and material as they do in the first section: instead, they tend the machines. Glass bottles progress through the assembly line as designed until 6:14 when a bottle breaks but the machine keeps going, causing glass to shatter and spill off the line for approximately 10 seconds. Finally, a worker calls out an alarm and others spring into action to save the machine from itself by re-establishing the assembly line. Shortly after the crisis, jazz returns, and in the last three minutes of the film, Haanstra combines closeups of the

rhythmic movements of the glassblowers' hands with the timed actions of the bottle machine, to the puffed cheeks of the blowers, and to the soundtrack itself: melding artisan with machine. Kaufman's film has no such soundtrack.

Shales reads the Haanstra film, in his chapter "Time in Glasscraft," as a pointed comment on automation and the loss of artisanal skill, "humans pitted against automation."<sup>116</sup> Curator Prashant Parvataneni does much the same on his blog *The Essential Mystery* when he states that *Glas* "is at once a passionate celebration of human labour and craftsmanship and a biting critique of the mechanistic mass-production of objects...[This] juxtaposition coupled with Haanstra's strong stylistic intervention takes the film into a polemical space."<sup>117</sup> Shales contextualizes the film by explaining that the film can be seen as a manifestation of the post-Second World War concern with preserving cultural heritage as the "Pressing question was how to define the loss of manual trades in relation to techniques of automation."<sup>118</sup> Writer Colin Marshall notes how the frantic oscillation in the final three minutes between craftsman and machine meld the two "into musical instruments of a kind."<sup>119</sup> I read it as more complicated than that, especially in light of the Kaufmann film in relation to the binary of factory versus studio glass. In the Haanstra film, the melding of craftsman and machine conveys the notion that factory made glass, no matter who or what makes it, is related, and so much so that it all melts into one.

Shales argues that Haanstra misleadingly isolates the blower as a solitary figure, when in fact glassblowing at Leerdam was executed in teams.<sup>120</sup> His critique is too strong. Yes, there is a focus in *Glas* on the individual (the gaffer to be precise) but there are multiple times when many hands are seen working together. There is only one set of hands in the Kaufman film. Shales' point relates to the romantic ideal of the individual artist-craftsman which blossomed in craft in the late 1950s, the time of the *Glas* film.<sup>121</sup> Therefore, it makes sense that the myth of the lone craftsman was perpetuated through clever cutting and camera angles.

Unlike the Haanstra film, the lone artist-craftsman is front and center in the Kaufman film and the artist-craftsman is not blowing to soothing jazz but is immersed in the droning noise of the hot shop. His ability to navigate the various moments of the workmanship of risk as he works alone in the hot shop are front and center in the film.



When asked about the Haanstra film and whether it was inspiration for his, Kaufman states “I had seen that film when I was a student but it had no bearing on the footage of me. That was orchestrated by the SAIT film students who I believe are responsible for the production. They might have asked me a few things about glass working but the sequence of events in the film of the blowing process is not quite right. The choreography, so to speak, is a depiction of how we all worked in the hot shop at that time. I doubt that the SAIT students were aware of the Haanstra film.”<sup>122</sup> Although the sequence of events are a bit off, the film still speaks to the times and the perception of studio glass.



**Figure 118** Robert Held, *Vase*, c. 1980. Glass, 75 x 63.5 cm. Collection: Canadian Museum of History, 83-886, S95-8673. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the Canadian Museum of History.

During the early years of the studio glass movement in Canada, along with the collective zeitgeist of Expo 67, there was also a developing sense of the importance of the individual in society. Klein explains that glass became popular in 1960s America because of “a general preoccupation with self expression.”<sup>123</sup> Craft and design curator, Alan C. Elder gives a specific Canadian context in his essay “When Counterculture Went Mainstream” by explaining that the increased institutional acceptance in 1960s Canada of quirky, countercultural individualism (in the form of handmade crafts) was due to the “increased attention given to Canadians’ individual identity and rights. The Quebec separatist movement, womens’ liberation, and gay and Native rights were much discussed in Crescent Street’s cafés and in Parliament.”<sup>124</sup> This in turn played out in both

Canada and the United States with an increased interest in craft as a form of “authentic” individual expression. Klein explains:

There was a growing dissatisfaction with the Establishment and, after the war in Vietnam, a deep distrust of it. ‘In the ‘60s many talented young men and women, and some not so talented, turned away from the traditional paths of fulfillment in a money-oriented society to the ideal of shaping their lives by shaping objects with their hands.’ Experimenting with a material that offered so much unexplored artistic territory was particularly appealing. The great craft revival was closely related to this desire to create from within oneself without reliance on others; to make with one’s own hands, or, in the case of glass, ‘to make a form with human breath.’<sup>125</sup>



**Figure 119** Robert Held, *Vase*, c. 1980. Glass, 23.0 x 21.0 cm. Collection: Canadian Museum of History, 83-731, S95-8681. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the Canadian Museum of History.

Although Kaufman was filmed at the end of the 1970s, there is still a lingering sense of the 1960s celebration of individualism: his lone activities in the hot shop, his winged “funky” headband, and shattering ending. Individualism is also seen in early studio glass with its playful, chunky, thick-rimmed, and experimental aesthetic.<sup>126</sup> Think back to the Thorkelsson *Plate* (fig. 107), *Sphere* (fig. 109), or *Vase* (fig. 106). Klein explains, “During its early history the glass movement was about exploration; those involved in it felt free to twist, tweak and pull glass in all directions, until the basic bubble survived only as a ghost.”<sup>127</sup> An explicit Canadian example of the ghost-like effect of twisting, tweaking and pulling is *Vase*, 1973 by Martin Demaine of New Brunswick. When contrasting more subtle ghost-like pieces from the Prairies such as Held’s *Vase*, c. 1980 (fig. 119) and Thorkelsson’s light-eating orb *Sphere*, 1973 (fig. 109) with examples of Altglass (figs. 110 & 113), the initial volumetric bubble, the

foundation of every vessel in glassblowing, haunts the Held and Thorkelsson examples but is controlled in the Altaglass vase and decanter—evidence of workmanship of risk and certainty played out in glass form.<sup>128</sup> The small trapped, spun, and stretched bubbles within the glass also demonstrate a haunting versus a presence. In terms of individualism, the Altaglass blowers' ability to recreate the same object to near precise measurements as seen in this example of three “Venetian” style vases<sup>129</sup> is a valued skill within the Altaglass factory whereas the vessels from the early studio glass movement in Canada, even when they appear to be part of a series (figs. 118 & 119), express a sense of individualism, something valued within the academic and art worlds and culture of the time.



**Figure 120** Altaglass, *Bowl (in the shape of a swan)*, no date. Glass, 19 x 12 x 26 cm. Collection: Esplanade Museum, Medicine Hat, Alberta, 2002.21.8. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Museum, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

While I consider the binary of studio versus factory within the history of glass in Western Canada to be a false one, to ignore the division between studio glass and factory glass and the role the binary played in the development of studio glass would be a mistake. Note how the binary is at work in this 1971 comment by Littleton: “[In hot glass] artistic creation must occur in crisis, it cannot be planned or divided up; a blistered, mottled, collapsed, unidentifiable handblown glass object may be more valuable than a crystal swan”.<sup>130</sup> This quote refers directly to Caillois’ third principle of play—uncertain—where “the course of which cannot be determined, nor the result attained beforehand, and some latitude for innovations being left to the player’s initiative.”<sup>131</sup>

Interestingly enough, in terms of Littleton's quote and the false binary, Altaglass made hundreds of glass swans (fig. 120) and Kaufman's film ends with a split second of suggested crisis in the form of the sound of shattering glass. Might this moment of auditory destruction signal the activities in this other world are different? Might it signal a violent break from the kitschy glass of the past? Or might it be suggesting what was just made should not be treasured and kept but smashed in order to look forward and make way for something new?

Shales argues that breaking glass is a transformative and intuitive act:

Though it seems absurd, it is probable that more people seek relaxation listening to cascades of glass shards than to waves of the ocean on any given night—by watching a Hollywood blockbuster. Delete the sound of breaking glass and splintering debris from an action movie and there would be little excitement left in the car chases or gunfights. To sensationalize violence we exploit this material more than any other.<sup>132</sup>

Caillois explains there is also a vertigo of a moral order linked to a desire for disorder and destruction (recall Littleton's call for crisis): "this vertigo is readily linked to the desire for disorder and destruction, a drive which is normally repressed...nothing is more revealing of vertigo than the strange excitement that is felt in cutting down the tall prairie flowers with a switch, or in creating an avalanche of the snow on a rooftop."<sup>133</sup> Or perhaps in smashing glass? This moral vertigo can be seen in the 1960s when Canadians started to contest cultural norms in favour of pluralism and individual expression.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, approaching glass through vertiginous play in order to create an object full of personal expression which might very well be smashed at the end makes perfect sense and relates to the zeitgeist of the times. Remember that Caillois states *ilinx* momentarily destroys the stability of perception and inflicts a kind of uncertain (a principle of play) panic, something that I am sure a number of early glass blowers experienced when learning how to blow, mix their own batch and/or construct their own equipment. This sense of crisis and the sound of smashing glass is a negative in the Haanstra film but is playfully hinted at in the ending seconds of the Kaufman film.

Corning Museum of Glass reference and research librarian Gail Bardhan explains in "Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Women Working with Glass," that generally speaking, women who worked in glass factories were allocated jobs that did not require a lot of

training such as blowing, as they were not expected to work for the same amount of years as men, and therefore they often were involved in decorating, rough cold work, and other finishing tasks.<sup>135</sup> In addition to the point about training, the hot shop can be a sweltering hot environment and blowing glass through ilinx-related play demands a certain level of physicality, movements that might not be deemed “appropriate” for a sweaty female body to perform. However, as the 1960s and 1970s ushered in new forms of individual expression and the destabilization of gender norms, studio glassblowing offered a whirlwind environment for women to shatter gendered notions of acceptable comportment and physicality, to shatter learned body vocabulary, and to literally break the dishes. Consider Val Woodward’s quote regarding windsurfing in the article “Gybing Round the Buoys” where it is argued that windsurfing requires women to subvert learned feminine movements:

I argue that women who windsurf are challenging conventional ideas about both masculinity and femininity, as well as having a really good time. Windsurfing women, through their participation in a male dominated activity, are actively engaged in resistance and strategies for change, whether consciously or not. Windsurfing involves entering a privileged masculine world and an active physicality which contravenes norms of feminine embodiment.<sup>136</sup>

Replace “windsurfing” with “glassblowing” and it becomes apparent how powerful this form of creativity and ilinx-related play is and was to women when they entered the historically male dominated world of the hot shop. The sounds of shattering glass is and was part and parcel of the glassblowing process, especially when learning. As women such as Thorkelsson and Henry entered the hot shop, not only were they metaphorically breaking glass but shattering the glass ceiling as well. The ilinx-filled actions of early female studio glass blowers of the time complicate the liminality of glass. Rather than falling into the unconscious and unquestioned assumptions that Nochlin warns about and that are still prevalent in a number of the examples describing the 1962 workshop, the combination of “unfeminine” movements within a pseudo factory-studio setting with the “unskilled” or anti-technical work of early female studio glass blowers, complicates studio glass’ relationship to the amateur and DIY aesthetic associated with women’s craft production. When these unladylike blobs (figs. 106 & 109), sometimes with sharp bits that might cut you, are thought about in relation to those made by the “founding fathers,”

they become interesting in a completely different way and create a sense of excitement within me. I want to learn more and virtually spin these notions of liminality, gender and DIY around and around. Therefore, the relationship between ilinx and glass is not only seen in the objects themselves but in the movements in and environment of the hot shop and the effect glass can have on its audience.

I would be remiss if I did not explore how cultural developments in 1970s might have impacted the development of studio glass in the Prairie provinces. Although the 1960s saw the rise of individualism, it also saw the development of counterculture movements which continued into the 1970s. Nancy Janovicek explains in “Rural Countercultures” that Canadian countercultures were not monolithic but they shared three common goals: “decentralization and local control over governance; self reliance and mutual aid; and development of alternative economic models that rejected mass production and dangerous technological development.”<sup>137</sup> For Caillois, ilinx demands a world without rules where there is constant improvisation spurred on by a collective passion. The development of studio glass in Canada was ideally situated to fit into the counterculture movement in Canada both in urban centers and rural environments. In urban centers, separate hot shop spaces were set up in ceramic departments in order for students and teachers to work outside of the established power structures to play with the material without being worried, at first, about sales. As already stated, the aesthetics of early studio glass embraced an anti-mass production look and feel, and studio glass artists also created and improvised small-scale glassblowing equipment. While some glass blowers like Kaufman stayed in the city, others like Thorkelsson moved into the countryside. Thorkelsson stated in 1979:

I live at least 800 miles from the nearest glassblower and work in a primitive glass studio consisting of a propane fired furnace and an electric Lehr [a type of annealing kiln or oven]. I have no cold working equipment and most of the colours I use are purchased.

I set out to establish my own studio and produce glass after an introduction to basic glass blowing techniques at a summer course in 1973. My minimal training and my primitive working conditions have caused some frustrations but have encouraged self reliance and discipline.

The isolation has meant the freedom to produce objects that are influenced by what influences me. So, in my glass I see its own fluid transparency and my own emotional and physical circumstances.<sup>138</sup>

The apocalyptic hint heard at the end of the Kaufman film also relates to the cultural climate of the 1970s and can be read as ominous or angst-ridden. The American architecture and design critic Thomas Hine argues in *The Great Funk: Styles of the Shaggy, Sexy, Shameless 1970s* that “only a decade before [1960s], as the nation anticipated the conquest of space, the defeat of poverty, an end to racism, and a society where people moved faster and felt better than they ever had before, it seemed that there was nothing America couldn’t do.”<sup>139</sup> Hine explains in the 1970s however, “too late” dominated the zeitgeist: too late to do anything about pollution and the environment, too late to avoid the pending catastrophe related to over population, too late to find enough oil, and too late to combat climate change.<sup>140</sup> The optimism of the 1960s was shattered. Canada also experienced the anxiety of the oil crisis which led to economic stagnation—downtowns were riddled with empty buildings and broken windows. Kaufman’s shattering ending reflects this as well.

Although a hot shop is an energy intensive operation, which continues to put stress on any glassblowing operation (and contributed to the closing of Altaglass), the energy consumption within the small-scale operations of studio glass differs from the large factory endeavours. The 1970s economic crisis and uncertainty spurred on the notion that small development is beautiful. Although not studio glass related, economist Henry Trim explores the connection between science, technology, counterculture and the back-to-the-land movement in his chapter “An Ark for the Future: Science, Technology, and the Canadian Back-to-the-Land Movement of the 1970s.”<sup>141</sup> Trim explains that the Ark, a self sustaining Prince Edward Island bio shelter built by countercultural scientists from the New Alchemy Institute in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, “highlights the importance of scientific knowledge and technological innovation to the counterculture.”<sup>142</sup> It also explored an idea of small is beautiful, by attempting to create a way to live without dependence on large corporations or factories. Parallels abound between the development of studio glass and these types of utopic endeavours. Although the glass structure had

successes and failures, it closed in 1981 and came to a shattering end with its demolition in 2000.<sup>143</sup>

Technological innovation, science, individuality, counterculture movements, community, and the metaphor of shattering glass all played a part in the development of studio glass in the 1970s which coincided with a high level of economic, environmental, cultural uncertainty, and chaos. The 1970s was the perfect time for the risky individual studio glassblower to engage inilinx-related, material-driven play, whether the sounds of shattering glass be heard in an urban or rural studio.

### **The Blobject Oozes In**

Although studio glass in the Prairie provinces developed in a decade filled with uncertainty and panic, equating the sounds of shattering glass to tension, unease, utopic failure, and uncertainty, when the individualistic blob-like objects are examined in terms of the history of craft and design, early studio glass is excitingly futuristic and optimistic. Therefore, the shattering ending of the Kaufman film might be signalling new beginnings rather than dystopia and a sense of being “too late.”

Critic Garth Clark states in “How Envy Killed the Crafts,” that “Craft has been overdosing on nostalgia, the equivalent of sugar in art. This is craft’s Achilles heel. It was born as a revivalist movement and these activities (like a historic house museum) are powered by nostalgia.”<sup>144</sup> He argues that design, on the other hand, was metaphorically born at the same time as craft, the 1851 Great Exhibition, but “was driven by a desire to be new, inventive and flexible, constantly adjusting to the desires of its audience and to changes in lifestyle.”<sup>145</sup> While I try to resist jumping wholeheartedly into binary thinking, Clark’s description of design describes studio glass more accurately than his description of craft as studio glass sought to create new ways of engaging with the material and to not emulate the glass of the past. This inspired me to examine historical aesthetic developments in design in relation to early studio glass’ organic, playful, chunky, thick rimmed, and experimental aesthetic as craft’s nostalgic genealogy might not be sufficient.





**Figure 121** Robert Held, *Plate*, c. 1980–1983. Glass, 2.7 x 39.0 diam cm. Collection: Canadian Museum of History, 83-642, S95-9914. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the Canadian Museum of History.

My Clark-inspired spin towards design uncovered professor of industrial design Steven Skov Holt and curator Mara Holt Skov’s book *Blobjects & Beyond: The New Fluidity in Design*. They explain that “blobjects” are designed objects from the 1990s to today featuring complex curves that blend into one another, and the words associated with this aesthetic include goopy, drippy, flowing, blurry, globular, and liquid.<sup>146</sup> Design journalist Phil Patton traces the development of this aesthetic back to a post-Second World War aversion to streamlined design as it was associated with the machines of war and death: “Softer, natural forms were more human and more humane. Gone was the nobility of gear and propeller, now that both dealt death.”<sup>147</sup> According to Patton, the blob emerged during a time of post-war prosperity when everything seemed possible. The blob could be anything; for example the Rorschach test or the 1948 *L’il Abner* creature the Shmoo, a blob-like creature that could turn into any food the other characters desired.<sup>148</sup> By the 1950s, blobs and free-form shapes were associated with the “natural” or “crafted” and implied informality, and by the 1960s, free-form was associated with the freedoms championed by the counterculture movement.<sup>149</sup> These notions of freedom, nature, craft, and optimism continued to be associated with the blob throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as it became more toy-like, associated with computer-aided design, and was explored in industrial and furniture design where it finally developed into the “blobject” of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. To Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov, “The blobject is this generation’s master metaphor. It is our first psychologically and visually

compelling answer to the question, ‘How do biology, technology, culture, and emotion come together?’”<sup>150</sup> Examples of contemporary blobjects include *Rock Doorstop*, 1997 by Marc Newson for Magis,<sup>151</sup> *Soft Carpet*, 2000 by Karim Rashid,<sup>152</sup> and Selfridges Department Store, 2003 by Jan Kaplicky and Amanda Leveté of Future Systems.<sup>153</sup> As I previously argued, early studio glass—a drippy, goopy thing—also brought together emotion, technology and culture. In fact, early studio glass might very well be a proto-blobject, emerging just before other forms of the blobject were taking shape in furniture design as seen in the proto-blobject *Lockheed Lounge*, 1988 by Marc Newson for Pod.<sup>154</sup>



**Figure 122** Ione Thorkelsson, *Perfume Bottle* (A2093), 1977. Glass, 7.0 x 5.0 diam cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Consider Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov’s detailed description of the blobject in their chapter “The Look and Feel of Optimism.”<sup>155</sup> The blobject’s form is pleasingly plastic and fluid, it can exist at any scale, and the forms are enhanced by emotionally appealing colour. In terms of material, “A blobject is not just made of material; it celebrates its *materiality*.”<sup>156</sup> Although plastics have often defined the blobject, I would argue that glass was the original blobject material as there is a heightened sense of flowing materiality with glass and the blobject aesthetic. Finally, according to the authors, the blobject is optimistic, familiar, and welcoming, it appeals to the emotions as the curves are pleasing to touch and the colours please the eye. Now compare this detailed description of the blobject aesthetic to Held’s *Plate*, c. 1980–1983 (fig. 121), Thorkelsson’s 1977 *Perfume Bottle* (fig. 122) and *Wine Glass*, 1983 (fig. 123), and Henry’s *Paperweight*, 1984.<sup>157</sup> Held’s other ghost-like blobjects (figs. 118 & 119)

also relate as their forms celebrate the material and are blob-like in form, but his plate can serve as an illustration of the qualities listed above: the colour is appealing and toy-like and the form, while still plate-like, is fluid and organic. Its scale is ambiguous—it could be larger than a dinner plate or much smaller, and there is a sense of playful optimism. Figuring out how to use this plate would be a lot of fun. Thorkelsson's *Perfume Bottle* is more refined yet still exudes fluidity, and the *Wine Glass*' colourful stem bulges with a sense of fluid life. Ilinx is not as visible in these works yet it is still there, and the notion of play within the hot shop ties into the optimism of the blobject aesthetic.



**Figure 123** Ione Thorkelsson, *Wine Glass* (A4728), 1983. Glass, 17.5 x 8.5 cm. Reproduced by permission of the artist and the Canadian Museum of History.

The blobject is also seen in Altglass, indicating this might be another fruitful avenue of study as approaching through form blurs the boundaries between factory and studio. *Dish*, 1963–1968 (fig. 124) by Manuel Esteban Jr. is reminiscent of the early post-war proto-blobjects in form and colour. Altglass also created a massive amount of proto-blobjects in the form of their solid-worked animals such as the two birds resting on a base by Les Stagg, Jr (fig. 125). While objects such as these have been dismissed as kitsch, in light of the blobject and its significance to contemporary design, these examples of Altglass take on aesthetic significance and are just as engaging and point to contemporary trends as Held's, Thorkelsson's, and Henry's work do.



**Figure 124** Manuel Esteban Jr. for Altaglass, *Dish*, 1963–1968. Glass, 22.8 x 26.7 cm. Collection: Esplanade Museum, Medicine Hat, Alberta, 86.98.13. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Museum, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

By bringing design into the discussion on the history of glass, nostalgia and the biases of the design reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be navigated. Both studio and factory glass not only engage with ilinx-related play but both created proto-blobjects. While Holt and Skov argue that the blobject is an object that defines the late 20<sup>th</sup> century with its combination of biology, technology, and optimism, Patton included very little glass in his chapter on the roots of this aesthetic in part because his chapter ended at 1970. This crucial decade, with its tensions and upheavals, facilitated working with a material that demanded immense physicality and emotional input. Mirroring the changes experienced in the 1970s, glass acted like honey in one instance and then shattered into a million pieces in another, which required the makers to navigate uncertainty and chaos in creative ways. Early studio glassblowing required technological savvy and innovation, and this enabled makers to spin and play with the rules in the name of creative expression. Glass objects from the 1960s to 1980s, no matter where they were made (factory or studio), might appear at first glance to be heavy and awkward, but they represent in material and process the zeitgeist of the times and foreshadow the blobjects of the future.

## **Conclusion**

Like the psychopomp Hermes who travels and guides souls between worlds, this chapter has traveled between glass' different "worlds" in order to foster a rhizomatic connection between studio and factory glass rather than an exclusive mythic tale based on male artistic genius. The separation between the factory and studio is a construct, developed in the 1960s and 1970s to differentiate the types of glass objects being made. However, as I have argued, the difference does not lie with the type of object or where it was blown but

with the glassblower's navigation of risk. In fact, the two types of blowers have more in common than not.



**Figure 125** Les Stagg Jr. for Altaglass, *Untitled*, 1977–1980. Glass, 15 x 13.5 x 10.5 cm. Collection: Esplanade Museum, Medicine Hat, Alberta, 2003.1.42. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Museum, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

In all the glass examples included in this chapter, there is the presence of a whirlpool, vortex, or spiral, and it is by including pieces from different working environments that I have demonstrated how useful Caillois' notion of the *ilinx* can be when trying to approach and understand glass on its own terms rather than through an art historical lens or a craft-centric lens based on skill. *Ilinx* is present in the form of some pieces, in the decoration of others, in the physical approach to the material in all of them as they were all blown in the hot shop rather than cast in a kiln or formed through cold working, and/or is visible in tiny details such as the elongation of the tiny trapped air bubbles. Vertiginous play is an inescapable fact when working with hot glass but Caillois' game theory is also malleable enough to allow glass enthusiasts to explore the wider social impact on glass and vice versa.

The dominant genealogical based history of early studio glass in the Prairie provinces has served to support the unconscious and unquestioned assumptions of scholars, makers, and society at large. My goal has not been to rewrite or simply insert omitted examples (female, factory, decorative, etc.) into the discourse but to examine, think about, and understand how the values used to construct the dominant narrative of the "birth" of studio glass took hold and continue to exist. Early studio glass is liminal—it is transitional, it occurred at the initial stages of the studio movement, and exists somewhere between the binary of craft and art through its unique relationship to skill and a DIY aesthetic and approach to making. This liminality begs to be spun around and

played with, just as Kaufman did in the video which opened this chapter. In addition, through a glass-centric approach based on vertiginous play, I have “played” around with how these “big bang” narratives might be complicated, potentially undermined and even shattered on a broader methodological and structural level.

Early studio glass blowers in the Prairie provinces while not the first to blow glass in this part of Canada responded to and worked with aspects of ilinx found both in the hot shop and in Canadian culture in the form of, for example Expo 67, in order to express individualism and the counter culture rejection of social norms and structures. These cultural responses manifested into the early proto-blobject forms that innovatively expressed creative glass play in a way that had not yet been seen on the Prairies. The movements associated with blowing glass, especially for women, undermined oppressive notions of “lady-like” behaviour which reflected the massive changes in society that took place during the 1970s. The tension involved with blowing glass—the fact that at any moment it could fall to the ground and shatter—aligned with the sense of crisis which dominated the decade, making glass an appealing and timely material to play around with.

The concept of vertiginous play has fostered the development of a complex rhizomatic connection between glass’ different worlds and various other “worlds” including design, indicating how useful this approach can be. By including Holt and Skov’s notion of the “blobject” in the mix, design is able to aid in articulating why early studio glass objects were and still are relevant today which reaches beyond the worlds of glass and craft. Early studio glass objects are not just, as Director of the Toledo Museum Brian Kennedy says of examples from the 1962 Toledo Workshop, “rare relics of the humble beginnings,”<sup>158</sup> they are invitations and entry points into glass and social history. When those invitations are accepted, shattering things can happen.

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<sup>1</sup> William Warmus, *Fire and Form: The Art of Contemporary Glass* (West Palm Beach, FL: Norton Museum of Art, 2003), 11–12.

<sup>2</sup> Tramline scratches are parallel lengthwise scratch lines found on the film. It can be caused by the film coming into contact with machinery such as projectors, printers or processors. National Film & Sound Archive of Australia, s.v. “Tramline Scratching,” <http://nfsa.gov.au/preservation/glossary/tramline-scratching>, accessed May 21, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> The film clip I am describing here is a two-minute clip of Marty Kaufman blowing glass at the Alberta College of Art (ACA). Kaufman recalls that the clip was made in c. 1979 by the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) as

part of a larger promotional film for ACA. However, more research is needed in order to discover the title of the promotional film and all other relevant information.

<sup>4</sup> Luke Roman and Monica Roman, *Encyclopedia of Greek and Roman Mythology* (New York, NY: Facts on File, Inc., 2010), s.v. “Hermes (Mercury).”

<sup>5</sup> See Rosalyn J. Morrison, *Canadian Glassworks 1970-1990* (Toronto, ON: Ontario Crafts Council, 1991) and Julia Krueger, “Passing the Torch: Four Canadian Studio Glass Educators,” in *Crafting New Traditions: Canadian Innovators and Influences*, ed. Melanie Egan, Alan C. Elder and Jean Johnson (Gatineau, QC: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2008), 35–46.

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this paper studio glass will encompass “unique or limited-edition objects designed and made in a studio rather than a factory, often, but not necessarily, by the same person.” See David Whitehouse, *Glass: A Pocket Dictionary of Terms Commonly Used to Describe Glass and Glassmaking*, revised edition, (Corning, NY: The Corning Museum of Glass, 2006), s.v. “studio glass.”

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Metcalf, “Strattman Lecture: The Art Glass Conundrum,” *Journal* (The Glass Art Society) (2009): 27.

<sup>8</sup> Norman Faulkner, personal interview with the author, Calgary, Alberta, October 13, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Marty Kaufman, “Bio + CV,” [http://www.martykaufman.com/BIO+\\_CV.html](http://www.martykaufman.com/BIO+_CV.html), accessed January 20, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Joan Falconer Byrd, “Mark Peiser: Looking Within,” *American Craft* 64, no. 3 (June/July 2004): 32.

<sup>11</sup> Morrison, *Canadian Glassworks*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Byrd, “Mark Peiser,” 32; and Robin Dreyer, “The Joy of Hands at Work: Penland School and the Evolution of Craft Education,” in *The Nature of Craft and the Penland Experience*, ed. Jean W. McLaughlin (New York, NY: Lark Books, 2004), 19.

<sup>13</sup> There are numerous examples of the retelling of this mythic creation story including Karen S. Chambers, “Clearly Inspired: Contemporary Glass and its Origins,” in *Clearly Inspired Contemporary Glass and Its Origins*, Karen S. Chambers and Tina Oldknow (San Francisco, CA: Pomegranate Communications, Inc., 1999), 31. For use of the term “big bang” see Sebby Wilson Jacobson, “Glass’ Big Bang,” *American Craft* 72, no. 1 (Feb/Mar 2012): 42–50.

<sup>14</sup> Krueger, “Passing the Torch,” 35.

<sup>15</sup> Morrison, *Canadian Glassworks*.

<sup>16</sup> Cynthia Freeland, *Art Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 89–90.

<sup>17</sup> Freeland, *Art Theory*, 90–91.

<sup>18</sup> Beverly Sanders, “The G.I. Bill and the American Studio Craft Movement,” *American Craft* 67, no. 4 (August/September 2007): 60.

<sup>19</sup> Sanders, “The G.I. Bill and the American Studio Craft Movement,” 54.

<sup>20</sup> Catherine Siermacheski, “Analyzing Gender representation of Glass Artists in Museum and Gallery Catalogues,” in Universities Art Association of Canada 2011 Conference Program (Ottawa: Universities Art Association of Canada, 2011), 86–87. Morrison does mention a number of women including Laura Donefer, Irene Frolic and Martha Henry in her survey and does state that pre1940, in some of the Canadian glass factories, glass blowers created objects outside of work hours “for their own satisfaction.” However, the blown glass work of early Canadian studio glass figures such as Ione Thorkelsson did not make it into her survey.

<sup>21</sup> Canada Council for the Arts, *Saidye Bronfman Award*, <https://saidyebrofmanaward.ca/>, accessed February 9, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Morrison, *Canadian Glassworks*, 38–39.

<sup>23</sup> Christian Bernard Singer, *Glass Factor: Luminaries in the Canadian Art Glass Scene* (Waterloo: Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Ann Kaplan and Deanne Smith-Johns, *Art Glass of Canada: Exhibition Developed as Part of the Tenth Pan American Games Celebration* (Indiana: Indiana State Museum System, 1987), n.p.

<sup>25</sup> Allan Pringle, “Contemporary Canadian Glass Art,” in *Art Glass of Canada: Exhibition Developed as Part of the Tenth Pan American Games Celebration*, Ann Kaplan and Deanne Smith-Johns, (Indiana: Indiana State Museum System, 1987), n.p.

<sup>26</sup> Gunnar Lindqvist, *Bertil Vallien: glas äter ljus = glass eats light/Gunnar Lindqvist*, trans. Angela Adegren (Stockholm, Sweden: Carlssons, 1999) and Chambers, “Clearly Inspired, 45.

<sup>27</sup> Warmus, *Fire and Form*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> John Garrison, *Glass* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 37.

- <sup>29</sup> In his lecture, Bruce Metcalf lists handwork, craft mediums, techniques, formats and history as five attributes that contribute to categorizing something as “craft.” Metcalf, “Strattman Lecture,” 20.
- <sup>30</sup> Ezra Shales, “Time in Glasscraft,” in *The Shape of Craft* (London: Reaktion Books, 2017), 201.
- <sup>31</sup> Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” in *Art and Sexual Politics*, eds. Thomas B. Hess and Elizabeth C. Baker (New York: Collier Books, 1973), 7.
- <sup>32</sup> Dan Klein, *Glass: A Contemporary Art* (New York, NY: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1989), 11.
- <sup>33</sup> Klein, *Glass*, 8.
- <sup>34</sup> Corning Museum of Glass, “Harvey K. Littleton and the American Studio Glass Movement,” Corning Museum of Glass, October 18, 2011, <https://www.cmog.org/article/harvey-k-littleton-and-american-studio-glass-movement>, accessed March 25, 2020.
- <sup>35</sup> J.T., “Garage to Glory,” *American Craft* 53, no. 4 (August–September 1993): 10.
- <sup>36</sup> Tahree Lane, “Shining moment: Workshop held locally in 1962 paved the way for an artistic movement,” *The Blade* (Toledo, Ohio), June 9, 2012, <https://www.toledoblade.com/a-e/art/2012/06/10/Glass-workshop-held-locally-in-1962-paved-the-way-for-an-artistic-movement/stories/201206100002>, accessed March 26, 2020.
- <sup>37</sup> Martha Drexler Lynn, *American Studio Glass: 1960–1990* (Manchester, VT: Hudson Hills Press, 2004), 54.
- <sup>38</sup> Patricia Failing, “Studio Glass, 1945–1969,” in *Crafting Modernism: Midcentury American Art and Design*, eds. Jeannine Falino and Jennifer Scanlan (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2011), 256.
- <sup>39</sup> Lane, “Shining moment” <https://www.toledoblade.com/a-e/art/2012/06/10/Glass-workshop-held-locally-in-1962-paved-the-way-for-an-artistic-movement/stories/201206100002>, accessed March 26, 2020.
- <sup>40</sup> Isabella Webbe, “OPENING: 50 years later, 1962 Toledo Workshop pieces come home as Studio Glass artifacts,” *Urban Glass*, June 4, 2012, <https://urbanglass.org/glass/detail/opening-50-years-later-1962-toledo-workshop-pieces-come-home-as-studio-glas>, accessed March 26, 2020.
- <sup>41</sup> See Warmus, Lynn, Failing, Koplos, Metcalf, Sanders and Chambers’ texts cited in this chapter. Additional sources include: Joan Falconer Byrd, *Harvey K. Littleton: A Life in Glass: Founder of America’s Studio Glass Movement* (New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli, 2012); Peter Layton, *Glass Art* (London: A & C Black, 1996); and Dan Klein, *Artists in Glass: Late Twentieth Century Masters in Glass* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 2001).
- <sup>42</sup> Sandy Gibb and Stephen Inglis, “Catalogue: Glass,” in *Works of Craft from the Massey Foundation Collection*, ed. Stephen Inglis (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1984), 57.
- <sup>43</sup> Catherine Siermacheski, “Not So Fragile: An Ethnography of Women Glass Blowers in Western Canada” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2013), 37, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0073887>.
- <sup>44</sup> Morrison, *Canadian Glassworks*, 6.
- <sup>45</sup> Krueger, “Passing the Torch,” 35.
- <sup>46</sup> Gerald Stevens, *Glass in Canada: The First One Hundred Years* (Agincourt, ON: Methuen Publications, 1982), 14.
- <sup>47</sup> Morrison, *Canadian Glassworks*, 4.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Tim Dant, *Material Culture in the Social World* (Berkshire, England: Open University Press, 1999), 12.
- <sup>50</sup> David Surman, “Videogames and the Neo-Baroque,” (lecture, The Neo-Baroque Revisited, Museum London, London, Ontario, October 13, 2011).
- <sup>51</sup> Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1958; Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001). Citations refer to the University of Illinois Press edition.
- <sup>52</sup> Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 23.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid, 75.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid, 40.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid, 24–25.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid, 24.
- <sup>57</sup> I am indebted to the work of Greg Payce and Amy Gogarty in terms of it pushing me away from sticking with the literal material of my subject. In “Greg Payce: Illusion, Remediation, and the Pluriverse,” Gogarty explains how Payce uses remediation, to refashion the content of his ceramics into new media in order to “broaden the range of possible



encounters viewers might have with a given work.” See Amy Gogarty, *Greg Payce: Illusions* (Toronto, ON: Gardiner Museum, 2012), 11. For biographical information on Ione Thorkelsson see [www.thorkelson.com](http://www.thorkelson.com).

<sup>58</sup> Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 12.

<sup>59</sup> For “hobbyist” and “industrial glass blower” see Metcalf, “Strattman Lecture,” 20 and for “sculptor” and “glass artist” see Janet Koplos, “Strattman Lecture: Reconsidering Glass,” *Journal* (The Glass Art Society) (2006): 47.

<sup>60</sup> Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 39.

<sup>61</sup> Telephone conversation with the author, January 30, 2013.

<sup>62</sup> Dant, *Material Culture in the Social World*, 114.

<sup>63</sup> Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 9–10.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–6.

<sup>65</sup> Dant, *Material Culture in the Social World*, 114.

<sup>66</sup> Matthew Kangas, “Turning Points: How Eight Artist Moved From Clay to Glass,” *Glass* 88 (Fall 2002): 16–21.

<sup>67</sup> Klein, *Glass*, 11.

<sup>68</sup> Ione Thorkelsson, “ACAD Talk,” (lecture, Alberta College of Art + Design, Calgary, Alberta, January 23, 2012), PDF, <http://www.mts.net/~thorkels/03migration/migration.html>, site discontinued.

<sup>69</sup> Krueger, “Passing the Torch,” 38.

<sup>70</sup> Krueger, “Passing the Torch,” 35.

<sup>71</sup> Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Rhona Richman Kenneally and Johanne Sloan, “Introduction: Dusting Off the Souvenir,” in *Expo 67: Not Just a Souvenir*, eds. Rhona Richman Kenneally and Johanne Sloan, 3–24 (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

<sup>73</sup> Ben Highmore, “Into the Labyrinth: Phantasmagoria at Expo 67,” in *Expo 67: Not Just a Souvenir*, eds. Rhona Richman Kenneally and Johanne Sloan (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 126–127.

<sup>74</sup> Telephone conversation with the author, January 30, 2013.

<sup>75</sup> It is important to note that there was Canadian blown glass, such as examples by Chalet Artistic Canada of Cornwall, ON, at Expo 67. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine its impact on the visitor. For more information on Chalet glass see Conrad Biernacki, “Chalet Glass,” *Antique67.com*, <http://www.antique67.com/articles.php?article=79>, accessed May 22, 2020.

<sup>76</sup> Kenneally and Sloan, “Introduction,” 12.

<sup>77</sup> Claude Gagnon, “François Houdé,” *The Glass Art Society Journal* (1989): 7.

<sup>78</sup> Morrison, *Canadian Glassworks*, 9.

<sup>79</sup> Ione Thorkelsson, “Re: Some questions about your glass work from Julia,” e-mail correspondence with Julia Krueger, January 20, 2008.

<sup>80</sup> Stevens, *Glass in Canada*, 14. The Canadian Museum of History backs this assertion up as well but notes that there were earlier attempts, such as the glass enterprise in Rice Lake, ON to make glass in Canada that were unsuccessful. David R. Gray, “Canadian Glass,” *Glass Works: The Story of Glass and Glass-Making in Canada*, Canadian Museum of History, <https://www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/hist/verre/veint01e.html>, accessed May 6, 2018. For more information on Stevens’ pioneering research into early Canadian Glass see Gerald Stevens, *Early Canadian Glass* (Toronto: Coles Publishing, 1979).

<sup>81</sup> For an excellent study on the geochemical make-up of Mallorytown Glass in the Royal Ontario Museum see J. Victor Owen, “Geochemical Characterization of Alleged Mallorytown Glass (c. 1839–40) in the Royal Ontario Museum and Its Distinction from Contemporary Upstate New York Glassware,” *Canadian Journal of Archaeology* 27 (2003): 287–308. Owen reattributes a similarly styled pitcher to Redwood rather than Mallorytown. However, for the purposes of this paper, the importance is that expressive glass objects such as this were being made somewhere in North America.

<sup>82</sup> Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov, *Blobjects and Beyond: The New Fluidity in Design* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005).

<sup>83</sup> Owen, “Geochemical Characterization of Alleged Mallorytown Glass,” 290.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Chloe Zerwick, *A Short History of Glass* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1990), 72.

<sup>86</sup> Stevens, *Glass in Canada*, 45.

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- <sup>87</sup> Zerwick, *A Short History of Glass*, 75.
- <sup>88</sup> Stevens, *Early Canadian Glass*, xii.
- <sup>89</sup> Zerwick, *A Short History of Glass*, 79.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.
- <sup>92</sup> Penny Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2010), 35.
- <sup>93</sup> Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink*, 30–38.
- <sup>94</sup> Charles Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery, and Other Details* (J.R. Osgood, 1874), 251–252, <https://archive.org/details/hintonhousehol01eastgoog/page/n334/mode/2up/search/north+of+tweed>.
- <sup>95</sup> John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (Boston: Aldine Book Publishing, Co., 1890), 168–169, <https://archive.org/details/stonesofvenice12rusk/page/168/mode/2up/search/our+modern+glass>.
- <sup>96</sup> Shales, “Time in Glasscraft,” 210.
- <sup>97</sup> A useful definition can be found in Glenn Adamson’s book *Thinking Through Craft*: “Rather than presenting craft as a fixed set of things—pots, rather than paintings—this book will analyze it as an approach, an attitude, or a habit of action. Craft only exists in motion. It is a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institutions, or people. It is also multiple: an amalgamation of interrelated core principles, which are put into relation with one another through the overarching idea of ‘craft’.” Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 3–4.
- <sup>98</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, 168–169, <https://archive.org/details/stonesofvenice12rusk/page/168/mode/2up/search/our+modern+glass>.
- <sup>99</sup> Derek McNaney and Ann McNaney, *Swan Song: The Story of Altglass with a Guide to Identification & Values* (Red Deer: privately printed, 2005), 7.
- <sup>100</sup> McNaney and McNaney, *Swan Song*, 7–11.
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.
- <sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.
- <sup>105</sup> *Altglass* (Val Marshall Printing, no date), no page.
- <sup>106</sup> McNaney and McNaney, *Swan Song*, 8.
- <sup>107</sup> Ione Thorkelsson, “ACAD Talk,” (lecture, Alberta College of Art + Design, Calgary, Alberta, January 23, 2012), PDF, <http://www.mts.net/~thorkels/03migration/migration.html> (site discontinued).
- <sup>108</sup> Theatre Projects Consultants, “A new era begins at the Corning Museum of Glass,” Theatre Projects, March 24, 2015, <http://theatreprojects.com/en/news/view/310/a-new-era-begins-at-the-corning-museum-of-glass>, accessed March 18, 2020.
- <sup>109</sup> Marty Kaufman, Lecture, Bright Nights YYC Lecture series, Alberta Craft Council, cSPACE, Calgary, Alberta, February 18, 2020.
- <sup>110</sup> John Flanders, *The Craftsman’s Way: Canadian Expressions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 88.
- <sup>111</sup> Warmus, *Fire and Form*, 9.
- <sup>112</sup> Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 23.
- <sup>113</sup> David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (London: The Herbert Press, 1971).
- <sup>114</sup> Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship*, 20–22.
- <sup>115</sup> Bert Haanstra, *Glas* (Netherlands, 1958), YouTube, 9:58, posted by “o0Eyescream0o,” August 26, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLS7--ZLCoI>, accessed May 22, 2020.
- <sup>116</sup> Shales, “Time in Glasscraft,” 210.
- <sup>117</sup> Prashant Parvataneni, “Bert Haanstra’s Glas (1958) | Style of Substance,” *The Essential Mystery*, November 30, 2014, <http://essentialmystery.blogspot.com/2014/11/bert-haanstras-glas-1958-style-of.html>, accessed February 26, 2020.
- <sup>118</sup> Shales, “Time in Glasscraft,” 210.
- <sup>119</sup> Colin Marshall, “Glass: The Oscar-Winning ‘Perfect Short Documentary’ on Dutch Glassmaking (1958),” *Open Culture*, March 29, 2016, <http://www.openculture.com/2016/03/glass-1958.html>, accessed February 26, 2020.

- <sup>120</sup> Shales, "Time in Glasscraft," 210.
- <sup>121</sup> For more information on the "artist-craftsman" see Bruce Metcalf, "Contemporary Craft: A Brief Overview," in *Exploring Contemporary Craft: History, Theory and Critical Writing*, ed. Jean Johnson (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2002), 17–20.
- <sup>122</sup> Marty Kaufman, "Re: A question about the Haanstra film," e-mail correspondence with Julia Krueger, March 1, 2020.
- <sup>123</sup> Klein, *Glass*, 10.
- <sup>124</sup> Alan C. Elder, "When Counterculture Went Mainstream," in *Made in Canada: Craft and Design in the Sixties*, ed. Alan C. Elder (Montreal, QC & Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 111 & 113.
- <sup>125</sup> Klein, *Glass*, 10.
- <sup>126</sup> I want to be very clear here that I use none of these adjectives in a derogatory way. I absolutely love these early pieces!
- <sup>127</sup> Klein, *Glass*, 10.
- <sup>128</sup> For more information on Robert Held, see "About Robert Held," *Robert Held Art Glass*, 2020, <https://robertheld.ca/about>, accessed February 27, 2020.
- <sup>129</sup> For image see Derek and Ann McNaney, *Swan Song: The Story of Altglass with a Guide to Identification & Values* (Red Deer: privately printed, 2005), 92.
- <sup>130</sup> Klein, *Glass*, 11.
- <sup>131</sup> Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 9.
- <sup>132</sup> Shales, "Time in Glasscraft," 228.
- <sup>133</sup> Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 24.
- <sup>134</sup> Elder, "When Counterculture Went Mainstream," 116.
- <sup>135</sup> Gail Bardhan, "Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Women Working with Glass," *All About Glass*, Corning Museum of Glass, October 12, 2012, <https://www.cmog.org/article/breaking-glass-ceiling-women-working-glass>, accessed February 28, 2020. For more information on women and glass see "In the beginning: Herstory," in Lucartha Kohler, *Women Working in Glass* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2003), 8–27.
- <sup>136</sup> Val Woodward, "Gybing Round the Buoys," *Trouble & Strife* 33 (Summer 1996), 30.
- <sup>137</sup> Nancy Janovicek, "Rural Countercultures," in *Back to the Land: Ceramics from Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands, 1970 – 1985*, ed. Diane Carr (Victoria, BC: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2012), 10.
- <sup>138</sup> Mariette Rousseau-Vermette, *Metiers D'art3* (Paris: Canadian Cultural Centre, 1979), 36.
- <sup>139</sup> Thomas Hine, *The Great Funk: Styles of the Shaggy, Sexy, Shameless 1970s* (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2007), 3.
- <sup>140</sup> Hine, *The Great Funk*, 31.
- <sup>141</sup> Henry Trim, "An Ark for the Future: Science, Technology, and the Canadian Back-to-the-Land Movement of the 1970s," in *Canadian Countercultures and the Environment*, ed. Colin M. Coates (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2016), 153–177.
- <sup>142</sup> Trim, "An Ark for the Future," 155.
- <sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 168.
- <sup>144</sup> Garth Clark, "How Envy Killed the Crafts [2008]," in *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 449.
- <sup>145</sup> Clark, "How Envy Killed the Crafts," 450–451.
- <sup>146</sup> Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov, "Introduction: A Growing Fascination with Fluid Form," in *Blobjects & Beyond: The New Fluidity in Design*, eds. Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005), 12–15.
- <sup>147</sup> Phil Patton, "Twentieth-Century Roots of Organic Form," in *Blobjects & Beyond: The New Fluidity in Design*, eds. Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005), 27.
- <sup>148</sup> Patton, "Twentieth-Century Roots of Organic Form," 27–28.
- <sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 32–35.
- <sup>150</sup> Skov Holt and Holt Skov, "Introduction," 19.
- <sup>151</sup> To view image, visit Marc Newson, <http://marc-newson.com/rock-door-stop/>.

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<sup>152</sup> To view image, visit Artnet, <http://www.artnet.com/magazine/features/mason/mason4-19-5.asp>.

<sup>153</sup> To view image, visit EU Mies Award, <https://www.miesarch.com/work/670>.

<sup>154</sup> To view image, visit Marc Newson, <http://marc-newson.com/lockheed-lounge/>.

<sup>155</sup> Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov, "The Look and Feel of Optimism," in *Blobjects & Beyond: The New Fluidity in Design*, ed. Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005), 57–68.

<sup>156</sup> Skov Holt and Holt Skov, "The Look and Feel of Optimism," 65.

<sup>157</sup> To view image, visit Musée des maîtres et artisans du Québec Collection, [https://app.pch.gc.ca/application/artefacts\\_hum/humaines\\_humanities.app?w=henry%2C+martha&t=any&i=false&n=0&pID=1&r=50&s=1&v=none&l=l&lang=en](https://app.pch.gc.ca/application/artefacts_hum/humaines_humanities.app?w=henry%2C+martha&t=any&i=false&n=0&pID=1&r=50&s=1&v=none&l=l&lang=en).

<sup>158</sup> Isabella Webbe, "OPENING: 50 years later, 1962 Toledo Workshop pieces come home as Studio Glass artifacts," *Urban Glass*, June 4, 2012, <https://urbanglass.org/glass/detail/opening-50-years-later-1962-toledo-workshop-pieces-come-home-as-studio-glas>, accessed March 26, 2020.

## Chapter 4

### Narratives of a Reflective Virtuality: Re-activating Altaglass' Menagerie

“To be truly in the present is to be mindful of potential futures and pasts... Wood, clays, metal, textiles and glass gain the texture of time through craft.”<sup>1</sup> – Ezra Shales



**Figure 126** Installation detail of the Altaglass menagerie, part of the exhibition *Mireille Perron - The Anatomy of a Glass Menagerie: Altaglass*. Photo: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services, University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of the artist and Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.

One hundred and thirteen animals make their way across the gallery: 3 bulls, 5 squirrels, 3 elephants, 2 cats, 2 roosters, 1 seal, 6 penguins, 7 rabbits, 13 bears, 4 deer, 1 giraffe, 2 unicorns, 2 owls, 1 grouse, 1 song bird, 10 geese, 3 swans, 1 whale, 1 duck, 14 dogs, 11 horses, 1 turkey, 1 lion, 5 mice, 4 cows, 2 moose, 2 pigeons, 1 sheep, 1 pig, 1 seahorse, 1 fish, and 1 otter (fig. 126). You know these objects; you’ve seen them in homes, markets, and shops. Maybe you even own one, two, or three. Maybe you’ve inherited from your dearly departed aunt, one, two, or three. Maybe you’ve used one, two, or three as paperweights or cake toppers. These clear glass objects are visible yet invisible at the same time. But wait, encircling the grand processional menagerie in a blanket of blue are uncannily familiar cyanotype images. Do you recognize the subjects? Can you see one, two, or three horses? How about a poodle? One, two, or three? As you count the animals

and compare, what's different? Are you looking at glass? Are you experiencing the past or is this the present? Is this Canadian glass history?



**Figure 127** Mireille Perron (artist), Christine Sowiak (curator), *Mireille Perron - The Anatomy of a Glass Menagerie: Altaglass*, 2019. Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta. Photo: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services, University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of the artist and Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.

Nestled on shelves in the homes of parents, grandparents, and certain vintage aficionados, displayed every weekend on overcrowded tables at local flea markets, regularly sold on eBay and hidden away in the deep recesses of museum collections and vaults, the material culture of Altaglass is a visible/yet invisible manifestation of Western Canadian glass history. It is a physical embodiment of mid-century modern Prairie craft—deeply rooted and still buried in the collective memory. Mireille Perron's exhibition, *Mireille Perron - The Anatomy of a Glass Menagerie: Altaglass*, successfully and sensually uses the conceptual potentiality of glass to reactivate and highlight the importance of this small-scale Canadian glass studio (fig. 127).<sup>2</sup> Through her cyanotype studies of the Altaglass collection in the care of The Medicine Hat Historical Society and key historical glass objects housed at the Corning Museum of Glass, Perron's craft-based narratives firmly re-activate Altaglass' place in potential past, present, and future narratives. This chapter will explore three of those potential narratives: virtual vertiginous play, virtual impressions, and virtual worlds.

## Virtuality and Glass: A Craft-Based Approach



**Figure 128** [John Furch] *Making an Altaglass vase*, c. 1960. Photograph. Collection: Esplanade Archives, Altaglass Limited fonds, accession number 0602.0023. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Archives, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Alberta's Altaglass in Medicine Hat made and sold a number of different types of glass objects—hot worked vessels (bowls, pitchers, ashtrays, coasters, perfume bottles, and electric lamp bases), sculptures (various animals and fish), paperweights, and buttons, as well as frameworked glass sculptures—from its establishment in 1950 until its closure in 1988.<sup>3</sup> John Furch (1896–1976) (fig. 128), one of the founders of Altaglass, not only blew glass in the hotshop but also spent a considerable amount of time travelling throughout Canada selling his company's wares; salesmen were also employed to market Altaglass to retail outlets including Eaton's and Hudson Bay.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Altaglass sold, marketed, and displayed work at exhibitions and fairs such as the Calgary Stampede and the Medicine Hat Exhibition and Stampede (fig. 129) and directly through their salesroom (fig. 130). The hotshop was also informally opened to the public and was somewhat of a local tourist attraction, attested to by the numerous Altaglass postcards which were available for purchase at the hotshop.

Each piece of Perron's Altaglass procession was made by hand (but sometimes with the assistance of moulds) between 1950 and 1988 at the Altaglass factory in Medicine Hat, often in front of an audience, with custom batch glass formulated on a daily basis from raw materials and by different people with varying degrees of skill and training. To many, this sounds like a typical studio glass set up. However, during this

period and even into the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, objects such as the 2 cats, 14 dogs and all the other animals within this menagerie were identified, grouped together, and studied according to the materials used and where they were made. In Altaglass' case, the objects were craft, not art, because they were made of glass, and that pack of cute puppies were/and in many cases still are not considered to be “studio glass” because they were made by people affiliated with a factory (fig. 131) and not by “independent” studio glass artists or studio glass faculty.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 129** *Altaglass display* [at the Medicine Hat Exhibition and Stampede with Margarete Stagg and John Furch], 1955. Photograph. Collection: Esplanade Archives, Altaglass Limited fonds, accession number 0602.0004. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Archives, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Beginning in the 1960s, a division between art and craft developed within glass and paralleled the establishment of post-secondary glass programs and the rise of individual expression in both the United States and around the world. Consequently, surveys such as Rosalyn J. Morrison's *Canadian Glassworks 1970–1990* omit the fact that glass was being blown in Alberta before the launch of a glass program at the Alberta College of Art in 1975.<sup>6</sup> Such omissions, in turn, narrow the narrative and establish creation myths with founding fathers.<sup>7</sup> Within the past decade and a half, with publications such as Glenn Adamson's *Thinking Through Craft* and Maria Elena Buszek's *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, the discourse and definition of craft have dramatically changed from an understanding based on like-things and materials to one based on action, social context, and conceptual materiality.<sup>8</sup> This in turn



has challenged the discipline of glass and craftspeople such as Perron to move beyond the study of like materials and the hierarchy of makers towards inquiries centered around what is glass, what can it do, and where its place is in society.



**Figure 130** Margarete Stagg at the Altaglass airport showroom, possibly 1950s. Photograph. Collection: Esplanade Archives, Altaglass Limited fonds, accession number 0602.0003. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Archives, Medicine Hat, Alberta.



**Figure 131** James Simpson, Freelance Photos Ltd., *Altaglass*, September 24, 1963. Photograph. Collection: Esplanade Archives, Freelance Photos Ltd. fonds, accession number FL00039. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Archives, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

*The Anatomy of a Glass Menagerie: Altaglass* represents a sustained study of glass and its place in Alberta history from glass and craft centric perspectives—it approaches glass on glass' terms. Perron's first cyanotypes of Altaglass were created in 2014 during a residency at Medalta in the Historic Clay District of Medicine Hat, AB (fig. 132).<sup>9</sup> She returned for two subsequent residencies to the Hycroft China Ltd. factory where the Altaglass collection is housed, and with each visit the cyanotypes grew larger and more complex in terms of composition (figs. 133, 134 & 135). In order to place

Altaglass within a broader cultural and historic context, Perron also visited the Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, NY in 2015 where she created sixteen cyanotypes of historic glass animals including a Roman mouse from the third to fourth century. As a Feminist Pataphysicist, Perron is interested in the intersections of scientific, sensual, material, social, cultural, personal, and collective imaginaries.<sup>10</sup> By traversing the crossroads of science, material, and the imaginary, Perron's *Anatomy of a Glass Menagerie* does more than just record the invisible; it uses an important concept of glass—the virtual—in order to reactivate Altaglass' history, present, and future.



**Figure 132** Mireille Perron, *Isolated Specimens*, 2014. Cyanotypes on paper, 20 x 25.5 cm, mounted on letter size (23 x 30.5 cm) clipboards. Photo: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services, University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of the artist and Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.



**Figure 133** Mireille Perron, *Mid-Size Narrative Compositions*, 2015. Cyanotypes on paper, 28 x 35.5 cm, mounted on 38 x 51 cm clipboards. Photo: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services, University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of the artist and Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.



**Figure 134** Mireille Perron, *Installation view of Mid-Size Narrative Compositions and Altaglass animals*. Photo: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services, University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of the artist and Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.



**Figure 135** Mireille Perron, *Installation view of Large-Scale Narrative Compositions, 2015–2017*. Cyanotypes on paper, 71 x 86 cm and 76 x 86 cm. Photo: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services, University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of the artist and Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.

Koen Vanderstukken explains in *Glass: Virtual, Real* that in terms of glass, “virtual” does not have the same meaning as it does in physics or computer science.<sup>11</sup> Instead, “virtual” is used to describe the imaginary, otherworldly quality of glass and can be understood as the opposite of “real.”<sup>12</sup> Vanderstukken goes so far as to quote a definition found in the *Nederlandse encyclopedie* which states that “virtual” is an “image that is perceived differently by the eye than it is in reality, eg distant objects seen close up through a telescope.”<sup>13</sup> The connection he draws to the telescope relates to the

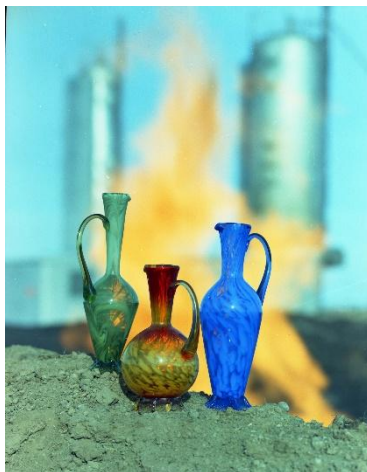
development of glass prisms, mirrors, and lenses. It is important to note as John Garrison astutely points out in the book *Glass* that “the story of the history of glass is one about exploration and discovery. The microscope and the telescope enabled humans to imagine other worlds and distant lands, in turn powering exploration and colonialism.”<sup>14</sup> Glass enables discovery, exploration, and the creation of new worlds and realities.

Vanderstukken explains “But even when we do perceive glass, optics tell us, the light rays coming through a transparent object are bent, meaning that we see the object not as it really is but only as a refraction of the light, distorting the object. So what we perceive is an unreal image of the real object—in other words, a virtual object. Expressed simply, what we are seeing is not there, and what is there, we do not see” (notice the child’s distorted face within the glass bubble in fig. 136).<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that although he distances himself from the computer science understanding of the virtual, Vanderstukken argues that glass’ existence between reality and virtuality makes it a perfect material to explore a world that relies on glass to convey information.<sup>16</sup> Perron astutely plays with glass’ unique position by carefully examining objects made in the virtual world of the hotshop, and, by looking through glass objects for virtual realities, narratives, and worlds.



**Figure 136** Frank Webber, *Medicine Hat News*, *Glass blowing demonstration*, 1972. Photograph. Collection: Esplanade Archives, Medicine Hat News fonds, accession number 0110.207. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Archives, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

### Vertiginous Play in “Hell’s Basement”



**Figure 137** James Simpson, Freelance Photos Ltd., *Altglass*, February 1968. Photograph. Collection: Esplanade Archives, Freelance Photos Ltd. fonds, accession number FL00040d. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Archives, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Medicine Hat is located in the southeast corner of the province, is one of Alberta’s larger cities, and the South Saskatchewan River runs through it.<sup>17</sup> Rudyard Kipling purportedly wrote a letter published in a 1907 local newspaper stating: “this part of the country seems to have all hell for a basement and the only trap door appears to be in Medicine Hat.”<sup>18</sup> Hell, a virtual world in itself, refers here to the area’s natural gas resources (note in fig. 137 the combination of energy sector architecture, fire, and glass in a 1968 advertising photograph). In the spring of 1950, John Furch (fig. 128) and Les (1920–1985) and Margarete Stagg (1925–2000) (fig. 130) found the metaphorical trap door when they established a small family owned and operated hot glass studio in Aircraft Hangar 3 at the Medicine Hat airport and later on 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW (fig. 131).<sup>19</sup> Furch, who was born in Cukmantl, Czechoslovakia, had to flee his home country due to political unrest. In the early 1930s, the family found themselves in England where he worked as a welder and eventually switched to working with glass at the Nasing Glass Works near London.<sup>20</sup> Furch, his wife Emily (1897–1987), and his daughter and son-in-law, Margarete and Les Stagg, came to Canada in 1949 and initially worked in various glass factories in Ontario before moving to Alberta.<sup>21</sup> Furch and Les Stagg built their own equipment and mixed their own glass batch while Margaret Stagg concentrated on engraving and appeared in a number of promotional images (fig. 138).<sup>22</sup> The company made an astounding array of

pressed, solid, and blown functional and decorative glass wares. In a promotional Altaglass pamphlet, it states “To Canada, from the ‘Old World’ have come the Master-Craftsmen, who make this exquisite ‘blown’ glassware. Each piece is individually ‘crafted’ and the variety of color ‘tones’ and shades make it ideal for blending with traditional as well as ‘period’ furnishing” (fig. 117).<sup>23</sup> Over the years, the company employed a number of glassblowers from the “old world” including Manuel Esteban (d. 1993) (fig. 139) and Francisco Ribas from Spain (fig. 136), Josef Takacs from Hungary, Daniel Vargas from Mexico, and Charles Sinclair from Northern Ireland.<sup>24</sup> Sinclair produced a vast majority of the lampworked wares. Perron states that she likes to think about the Altaglass collection “as a repository of social objects: a combination of popular art, craftsmanship, science, and the cultural and political context of the times....I understand them as odes to/from immigrant families who made new homes in Medicine Hat.”<sup>25</sup> From the advertising ephemera to the images like the one of Margarete welcoming people to Medicine Hat, it is clear the visitor and immigrant experience play an important role in the history of Alberta glass. Perron’s poetic installation of the processional menagerie highlights this visible/yet invisible narrative of immigration. In addition, it goes without saying these glass objects were destined for Canadian homes rather than white cube galleries, solidifying their place in the collective memory of many western Canadians as beautiful examples of hand-made craft or as kitschy objects cluttering a domestic interior.<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 138** *Margarete Stagg welcoming visitors to MH, possibly the 1950s. Photograph. Collection: Esplanade Archives, Altaglass Limited fonds, accession number 0602.0001. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Archives, Medicine Hat, Alberta.*



**Figure 139** James Simpson, Freelance Photos Ltd., *Altaglass [Manuel Esteban working in the hotshop]*, January 1973. Photograph. Collection: Esplanade Archives, Freelance Photos Ltd. fonds, accession number FL00045-b. Reproduced by permission of Esplanade Archives, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

The menagerie of glass animals included within this exhibition were all created in the virtual space/reality of a glass hotshop where, once again, the metaphor of hell's basement becomes acutely real through the unbearable heat of the furnaces (fig. 139). Both the place and actions are key in terms of understanding the virtuality of the hotshop. In his influential book *Man, Play and Games*, French sociologist and critic Roger Caillois outlines six essential qualities of play including the following: play is separate and bounded within clearly pre-defined limits of time and space; it is governed by rules; and there is the presence of a second reality during play.<sup>27</sup> Blowing glass in the Altaglass hotshop, especially during lunchtime when competitive one-of-a-kind “lunchbox” items were made, falls into the category of play as it is a separate space bounded by its own rules and reality where creativity happens.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, a particular form of play, *ilinx* (vertiginous play), can be used to address glass and in particular Altaglass on its own terms because working with glass in the hotshop requires a constant spinning motion.<sup>29</sup> Caillois defines *ilinx*-type games as those “based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. In all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness.”<sup>30</sup> The whirlpool-like spinning motion of *ilinx* is evident through the purposeful addition of industrial “flaws” such as bubbles and flecks of opaque glass within the clear, transparent material which amplifies and makes visible the spinning

motion of vertiginous play within the virtual world of the hotshop (Fig. 140). Bubbles and other inclusions in a mechanically produced object such as a wine bottle are considered flaws. However, Altaglass bares these marks of creativity and play which is in stark contrast to flawless, mechanically produced glass.



**Figure 140** Altaglass, *Rabbit*, no date. Glass, no size. Collection: The Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District, Courtesy of Medalta. Photo: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services, University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.

### **Virtual Impressions: Photography and Glass, Distant Cousins**

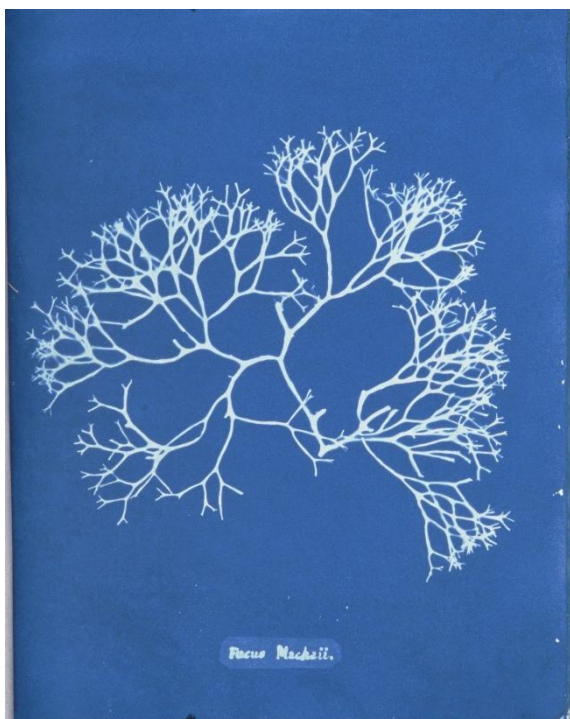
Perron's selection of clear, transparent glass is significant for two reasons. The first is clear glass is associated with modernism, a time period on the Prairies that is of particular interest to her. Bruce Metcalf stated in a 2009 lecture: "Glass was an icon of modernity to early 20<sup>th</sup> century architects... To them, the building of the future would be transparent and visually weightless, made entirely of glass."<sup>31</sup> Ezra Shales notes in "Time in Glasscraft," that clear, transparent glass facilitates a parenthetical temporal boundary (think about the virtual here) as it implies a sense of immediacy.<sup>32</sup> The second reason Perron focuses on clear glass in *Anatomy of a Glass Menagerie* involves light, which is an important element for cyanotypes and glass.

In 1841–42, astronomer and chemist John Frederick William Herschel (1792–1871) invented the cyanotype.<sup>33</sup> The cyanotype process involves brushing a porous surface, such as paper, with a solution of ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide and then drying the prepared surface in a dark place. When the treated surface is subsequently exposed to ultra violet (UV) light found in sunlight, the light-



sensitive iron salts create a blue dye known as Prussian blue, which varies in intensity according to the amount of UV light exposure.<sup>34</sup>

This cameraless method, commonly called “sun-printing” was adopted by the English photographer and botanist Anna Atkins (1799–1871). From an early age, Atkins assisted her father with his scientific activities and through him met Herschel, as well as William Henry Fox Talbot (1800–1877), author of the *Pencil of Nature* (1844–1846).<sup>35</sup> Talbot’s text was significant in shaping popular understanding of photography’s uses to scientific inquiry and the publishing world. Atkins was the first person to use the cyanotype process in a long-term scientific study of the natural world when she created thousands of blueprints of algae.<sup>36</sup> In 1843, she published the first part of her study titled *British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* (Fig. 141), and by 1850, she had subsequently published another 12 parts. Her work is credited with expertly combining science with aesthetics.<sup>37</sup> Perron has studied one of the known copies of Atkins’ book at the New York Public Library’s Science and Medicine Collection and credits Atkins as an inspiration for this project.<sup>38</sup>



**Figure 141** Anna Atkins, “Fucus Machaili,” 1850, from *Photographs of British algae: cyanotype impressions, Volume I*. Cyanotype. Collection: Spencer Collection, The New York Public Library. Source: New York Public Library Digital Collections, <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47d9-4a8c-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>.

The arrival of photography marked a new way of “accurately” seeing, communicating, recording, and experiencing the modern age. Noted art critic Lady Elizabeth Eastlake (1809–1893) acknowledged photography’s strength in 1857:

For everything for which Art, so-called, has hitherto been the means but not the end, photography is the allotted agent—for all that requires mere manual correctness, and mere manual slavery, without any employment of the artistic feeling, she is the proper and therefore the perfect medium. She is made for the present age, in which the desire for art resides in a small minority, but the craving, or rather necessity for cheap, prompt, and correct facts in the public at large. Photography is the purveyor of such knowledge to the world. She is the sworn witness of everything presented to her view. What are her unerring records in the service of mechanics, engineering, geology, and natural history, but facts of the most sterling and stubborn kind?...facts which are neither the province of art nor of description, but of that new form of communication between man and man...Every form which is traced by light is the impress of one moment, or one hour, or one age in the great passage of time...Here, therefore, the much-lauded and much-abused agent called Photography takes her legitimate stand. Her business is to give evidence of facts, as minutely and as impartially as, to our shame, only an unreasoning machine can give.<sup>39</sup>

Derrick Price and Liz Wells discuss photography in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in “Thinking about photography: debates, historically and now,” and their comments take Eastlake’s observations to the next logical step: “Photography was a major carrier and shaper of modernism. Not only did it dislocate time and space, but it also undermined the linear structure of conventional narrative...The photo-eye was seen as revelatory, dragging ‘facts’, however distasteful or deleterious to [from?] those in power, into the light of day.”<sup>40</sup> It is significant to note that throughout the early development of photography, clear glass in the form of lenses played a crucial role.

Garrison explains that the camera lens facilitates the collapse of the separation between past, present, and future. For example, the camera can capture a single moment in a person’s life, to be memorialized for the future, that will subsequently be looked upon in the present but be understood as a past version of that person. Basically, the lens (which is glass) facilitates a virtual sense of time. But what happens when there is no lens and no camera? Can this virtual collapse of time and reality still happen? Vanderstukken explains “If for instance, I look at any transparent glass object, it is clear that visual distortions are occurring because of light refraction. These distortions change not only the reality that I perceive through the object but also the visual reality of the object itself.”<sup>41</sup>

In the case of Perron’s cyanotypes, the Altaglass objects are now the lenses: the animals act as their own analytical instruments. We peer through the puppies and the whale, which distort our reality and the animals themselves.



**Figure 142** Mireille Perron, *Isolated Specimen*, 2014. Cyanotype on paper, 20 x 25.5 cm, mounted on letter size (23 x 30.5 cm) clipboard. Photo: Yolande Krueger. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

This Atkins-inspired study and particular way of seeing is fundamentally modern and approaches glass from a glass perspective. The glass whimsies also reveal the genealogical connection between glass and photography: they are like distant cousins. Perron has cleverly used the transparent qualities of glass and the illuminating qualities of light to analyze the crafted nature of each piece. How many skeletal structures do you see (fig. 142)? One, two, three or more? What about those handmade punctums—bubbles, scratches or other “flaws” in the glass (fig. 140)? How many do you see? One, two, three or more? The subsequent cyanotypes act as x-rays, revealing inner structures, processes, and vertiginous play while simultaneously collapsing reality, time, and space. Therefore, by way of virtuality, we are able to understand these objects in a new craft-like way.

During the first trip to Medalta in 2014, Perron placed a single object on the smallest size of paper (figs. 143 & 144). These first light-derived impressions are visually the most like Atkins’ work and other early scientific photography. The isolation of the specimen on a neutral void is meant to, as Eastlake says, be the sworn witness of facts. However, it is important to note the photographic eye is not neutral and fundamentally

truthful; it can be manipulated. The early modernist proponents of the photograph as a truthful way of seeing forgot to include the photographer who selects the subject and frames it in their analysis of this new utopic eye. A neutral background might isolate the subject and focus the gaze, but the choices of the photographer and the biases of the viewer blur that supposed neutrality.



**Figure 143** Altaglass, *Dog*, no date. Glass, no size. Collection: The Historical Society of Medicine Hat and District, Courtesy of Medalta. Photo: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services, University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of the artist and of Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.



**Figure 144** Mireille Perron, *Isolated Specimen*, 2014. Cyanotype on paper, 20 x 25.5 cm, mounted on letter size (23 x 30.5 cm) clipboard. Photo: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services, University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of the artist and of Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.



**Figure 145** Mireille Perron, *Mid-Size Narrative Compositions*, 2015. Cyanotypes on paper, 28 x 35.5 cm, mounted 38 x 51 cm clipboards. Photo: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services, University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of the artist and of Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.



**Figure 146** Mireille Perron, *Large-Scale Narrative Compositions*, 2015–2017. Cyanotype on paper, size uncategorized. Photo: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services, University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of the artist and of Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.

Perron embraces the fallacy of the neutral photographic eye through juxtaposition, narrative in the medium, and large-scale cyanotypes she made during her second and third trips to Medalta. In an overt homage to Atkins, Perron juxtaposes local plant life with the Altaglass animals (figs. 145 & 146). The inclusion of the local flora reinforces

the importance of place within her project. Juxtaposition is also used to re-activate the vase and candy dish shapes by examining the similarities between the swans and vases (fig. 133). Seeing light impressions of the inner structures of movement and process become lines of flight within the mind. These juxtapositions and the larger scale also foster virtual narrative potentialities. Look closely, and you will see a ballerina riding a unicorn or a herd of horses gathered around a tree with a cowboy up in the top corner (fig. 147). What are their stories? Where are the horses going? To slaughter? Or are they running free? Where did the ballerina find the unicorn? Where is she going? How many more stories can you find? One, two or three? These imaginative worlds are filled with action, history, and mystery.



**Figure 147** Mireille Perron, *Large-Scale Narrative Composition*, 2015–2017. Cyanotype on paper, size uncategorized. Photo: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services, University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of the artist and of Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.

### **Virtual Worlds and Histories: Reflective Nostalgia**

In his 2008 lecture “How Envy Killed the Crafts,” ceramic theorist Garth Clark performed an autopsy of craft and determined that one of the leading causes of its death was an overdose on nostalgia: “Craft has been overdosing on nostalgia, the equivalent of sugar in art. This is craft’s Achilles heel... This is the reason why craft is so afflicted with

cloying whimsy and saccharine cuteness. Being hooked on nostalgia also seems to have stunted craft's ability to engage in a contemporary aesthetic."<sup>42</sup> While Clark was right to point out that craft was born of a revivalist movement nostalgically rooted in a utopic, Gothic past and that nostalgia is prevalent in North American studio craft today, he was a bit too quick in his condemnation. Just as light and the virtual are fundamentally important conceptual aspects of glass, nostalgia is deeply rooted in craft and is, in fact, one of its most productive critical standpoints. To dismiss nostalgia, to remove it from craft would shift craft ever-closer to art, the exact thing Clark is critiquing.

Nostalgia and memory are complex and virtual. The virtual nature of nostalgia makes it useful to glass as well as craft. Svetlana Boym discusses two types of nostalgia in her book *The Future of Nostalgia*: restorative and reflective. Simply put, the restorative nostalgic understands the past as utopic and seeks to rebuild this utopic ideal in the present—think “make American great again.”<sup>43</sup> Restorative nostalgia is what Clark is describing above, and it does afflict craft. However, Boym suggests another type of nostalgia:

Reflective nostalgia does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home; it is ‘enamored of distance, not of the referent itself.’ This type of nostalgic narrative is ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary. Nostalgics of the second type are aware of the gap between identity and resemblance; the home is in ruins or, on the contrary, has been just renovated and gentrified beyond recognition. This defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future. Through such longing these nostalgics discover that the past is not merely that which doesn’t exist anymore, but, to quote Henri Bergson, the past ‘might act and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality.’ The past is not made in the image of the present or seen as foreboding of some present disaster; rather, the past opens up a multitude of potentialities, nonteleological possibilities of historic development. We don’t need a computer to get access to the virtualities of our imagination: reflective nostalgia has a capacity to awaken multiple planes of consciousness.<sup>44</sup>

This description of restorative nostalgia explains the critical potentiality of embracing nostalgia within craft.

Perron has done just that by creating virtual worlds and narratives filled with reflective nostalgia. In the ballerina and unicorn cyanotype (fig. 148), the ballerina appears to be riding the unicorn. However, in the past when her impression was captured

in the cyanotype, she wasn't actually riding the unicorn as the objects were layered on top of each other while the paper was exposed to the sun. This inconclusive image sensually mimics the layering and melding of memories within the unconscious mind and collective memory of society. We think the ballerina was riding the unicorn and remember it that way because there is a photograph that hints at this narrative potential and virtual past, but maybe in the narrative, she was standing beside the animal. Critically examining the narratives of the ballerina and unicorn is reflective nostalgia at work and demonstrates Perron's sensual and imaginative use of nostalgia in order to critically examine personal and collective memory as well as history and craft's role within these discourses.



**Figure 148** Mireille Perron, *Large-Scale Narrative Composition*, 2015–2017. Cyanotype on paper, size uncategorized. Photo: Dave Brown, LCR Photo Services, University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of the artist and of Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary.

In *Mireille Perron - The Anatomy of a Glass Menagerie: Altglass*, the cyanotypes are ironic as the lensless and cameraless process employs the Altglass objects as lenses with a cameraless process that is classified as photography, which in turn references glass history and the role of glass in the discovery of new worlds. The Atkins-inspired cyanotypes are fragmentary and inconclusive as they do not give the



viewer a clear picture of the object. Instead it is a virtual image imbued with a sense of distance, and the uncanny as the unfamiliar familiar. The glass procession in the gallery and the cyanotypes exude narrative potentialities and virtual worlds. These include feminist activations of subjects and histories, collapsing the distinction between the human animal and the non-human animal, diaspora, newcomer histories and their stories within Alberta, and virtigenous play. The invisible is made visible. The virtual imagination of the reflective nostalgic opens up the possibility of exploring the relationship between past, present, and future. When this is combined with a glass-inspired project focused on the virtual potentialities of glass, the results hover at the horizon line of what is contemporary craft and what is contemporary glass. This is exactly where Perron's practice and *The Anatomy of a Glass Menagerie: Altaglass* are located.

Those shimmering, otherworldly creatures seem to be everywhere: flea markets, antique shops, and in the homes of countless Canadians. After experiencing *The Anatomy of a Glass Menagerie: Altaglass*, it is impossible to look at these objects in the same way. Those 2 owls and 13 bears are now more visible than ever. They, along with the cyanotypes, speak to the past, present, and future of Alberta, Canada, glass, and craft. Concerning studio glass' future, Perron hopes that Altaglass' diverse and exotic menagerie acts as the benevolent precursors to the many Albertan contemporary studio glass collectives such as Bee Kingdom, Firebrand Studio, Fireweed Studio, Burnt Glass Studio, and The Glass House Fine Art Collective with its mobile glassblowing studio. All, like Altaglass, are engaged in vertiginous play and would benefit from a reflective nostalgic perspective of Alberta's glass history.

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<sup>1</sup> Ezra Shales, "Time in Glasscraft," in *The Shape of Craft* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2017), 239.

<sup>2</sup> Mireille Perron – *The Anatomy of a Glass Menagerie: Altaglass* was on display from January 31, 2019 to April 13, 2019 at Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB. The exhibition was curated by Chief Curator Christine Sowiak.

<sup>3</sup> Derek and Ann McNaney, *Swan Song: The Story of Altaglass with a Guide to Identification & Values* (Red Deer: privately printed, 2005), 7–11.

<sup>4</sup> McNaneys, *Swan Song*, 15.

<sup>5</sup> See the definition for the “Studio Glass movement” in Corning’s pocket dictionary on glass for an example of this distinction: “A movement that began in the United States in the 1960s and has spread all over the world. It is characterized by the proliferation of glass artists who are not affiliated with factories, but work with hot glass in their own studios.” David Whithouse, *Glass: A Pocket Dictionary of Terms Commonly Used to Describe Glass and Glassmaking*, revised edition (Corning: The Corning Museum of Glass, 2006), 82–83.

<sup>6</sup> My comment here is not meant to diminish the importance of this text. In fact, it is unfair in some ways to critique Morrison’s project on the basis of her omission of Altglass as the exhibition and text chronicle the rise of studio glass which she clearly defines. In addition, she does open with a short paragraph on pre-1940 “factory-like glasshouses.” Rosalyn J. Morrison, *Canadian Glassworks 1970–1990* (Toronto: Ontario Craft Council, 1990). The establishment of the ACA glass program is, depending on the source, either 1974 or 1975 Morrison, *Canadian Glassworks 1970–1990*, 17 or Julia and Yolande Krueger “A Brief History of Glass Education in Canada,” *Contemporary Canadian Glass* 5, no. 3 (Winter 2006): 25.

<sup>7</sup> For more on this division and my rejection of it see: Julia Krueger, “Shattering the Cannon: Spinning a Discourse,” *Cahiers métiers d’art: Craft Journal* 6, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 88–101.

<sup>8</sup> Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007) and Maria Elena Buszek, ed., *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> This is not the first time Perron has used cyanotypes in her work. In 2002, she presented a series of cyanotypes of opaque plastic animals at Truck Contemporary Art Gallery in Calgary, AB titled *The Bestiary: Instincts of the Herd*.

<sup>10</sup> Mireille Perron, “The Laboratory of Feminist Pataphysics,” <http://www.mireilleperron.com/index.htm>, accessed January 7, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Koen Vanderstukken, *Glass: Virtual, Real* (London: Black Dog Publishing Limited, 2016), 61.

<sup>12</sup> See the discussion on the modern, vernacular use of the term “virtual” in Alan Goodrich, “Virtuality,” *The University of Chicago: Theories of Media: Keywords Glossary*, Winter 2002, <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/virtuality.htm>, accessed January 7, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Vanderstukken, *Glass*, 61.

<sup>14</sup> John Garrison, *Glass* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 20.

<sup>15</sup> Vanderstukken, *Glass*, 61.

<sup>16</sup> Vanderstukken, *Glass*, 194.

<sup>17</sup> L.j. Roy Wilson, “Medicine Hat,” in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Canada, article published March 30, 2008; last Edited January 10, 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/medicine-hat>, accessed May 20, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Arlene and Robin Karpan, “History, artistry and nature abound in Medicine Hat,” *The Western Producer*, July 26, 2018, <https://www.producer.com/2018/07/history-artistry-and-nature-abound-in-medicine-hat/>, accessed January 7, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> McNaneys, *Swan Song*, 7.

<sup>20</sup> McNaneys, *Swan Song*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> The McNaneys claim they worked for the Glass Guild Company in Stratford, ON and Chalet Glass in Cornwall, ON but other sources contradict this. More research is needed here. McNaneys, *Swan Song*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> McNaneys, *Swan Song*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> *Altglass* (Val Marshall Printing, no date), no page.

<sup>24</sup> McNaneys, *Swan Song*, 8–9.

<sup>25</sup> Mireille Perron, “Anatomy Notes,” (artist statement), December 9, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> It is curious to note the passionate reaction people have to these objects. People either love them or hate them.

<sup>27</sup> The six essential qualities of play are: free (play is not compulsory), separate (bounded within clearly pre-defined limits of time and space), uncertain (results cannot be determined beforehand), unproductive (no goods or wealth are created), governed by rules (ordinary laws are suspended and replaced with new ones) and make-believe (the presence of a second reality). I will reject Caillios’ fourth quality (unproductive). Caillios asserts: “A characteristic of play is that it creates no wealth or goods, thus differing from work or art...Play is an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often of money.” I disagree. Play is not “pure waste.” Interactive play allows for socialization with others while solitary play allows for self discovery and is necessary for maintaining mental health. When I use the word “play” in relation to any type of craft, I am not infantilizing craft or denigrating it to some type of waste of time activity:ilinx related play requires a sophisticated, culturally shaped push-pull-spin. Roger Caillois, *Man*,

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*Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1958; Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 9–10.

<sup>28</sup> McNaneys, *Swan Song*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Roger Cailliois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1958; Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001). Citations refer to the University of Illinois Press edition.

<sup>30</sup> Cailliois, *Man, Play and Games*, 23.

<sup>31</sup> Bruce Metcalf, “Strattman Lecture: The Art Glass Conundrum,” *Journal* (The Glass Art Society) (2009): 27.

<sup>32</sup> Shales, “Time in Glasscraft,” 214.

<sup>33</sup> Dusan C. Stulik and Art Kaplan, *Cyanotype: The Atlas of Analytical Signatures of Photographic Processes* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2013), 4.

<sup>34</sup> Stulik and Kaplan, *Cyanotype*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (London, 1844; Project Gutenberg, 2010),

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/33447/33447-h/33447-h.html>, accessed May 20, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Naomi Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers* (Paris: Abbeville Press, 1994), 41.

<sup>37</sup> Naomi Blumberg, “Anna Atkins,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anna-Atkins>, accessed January 7, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Mireille Perron, *The Bestiary: Instincts of the Herd* (Calgary: Truck Contemporary Art in Calgary, 2002), n.p.

<sup>39</sup> Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, “A Review in the London Quarterly Review [1857],” in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, edited by Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 96–97.

<sup>40</sup> Derrick Price and Liz Wells, “Thinking about photography: Debates, historically and now,” in *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2000), 19.

<sup>41</sup> Vanderstukken, *Glass*, 61.

<sup>42</sup> Garth Clark, “How Envy Killed the Crafts [2008],” in *The Craft Reader*, edited by Glenn Adamson (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 450.

<sup>43</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.

<sup>44</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 50.

## Conclusion

“Modernists devised new windows on the world; postmodernists offered a shattered mirror. Modernism dreamt of utopian visions, which would transform society; postmodernism threw together a new look for a night on the town.”<sup>1</sup> – Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt

### Future Resonant Driven Flights

*Pickled Eggs*, the ceramic gallon of preserved eggs topped with a shimmering gold lustered rim by Victor Cicansky, and a number of the objects included in this dissertation are wondrous things that resonantly beg me to engage. When I encounter them, they are like doorways between the past, present, and future. I feel the electricity in the air and realize how much I still need to learn. I yearn to look closely at and touch the objects, to become wondrously inspired by them over and over again. “Indisciplined Ceramic Outhouses and Blob-like Glass Bunnies: Four Case Studies on Canadian Prairie Ceramics and Glass” is akin to a snapshot of some of the resonant exploration I have undertaken with a selected group of Canadian Prairie objects and craftspeople, but there is still so much more to do.

In his concluding remarks in *Thinking Through Craft*, Adamson states craft should be understood not as a subject of celebration but as a problem to be thought through again and again.<sup>2</sup> The integrated articles in this dissertation do this by thinking through the objects, materials, processes, and craft in a resonant way. As I recounted in the opening section of the introduction, objects play an important role in connecting to and understanding the past. The purpose of this study is to construct, propose, and play with new indisciplined, object-inspired approaches which can then be used to study craft in a resonant and productive way. By combining methodological approaches found in material culture studies with craft theory and art history, this study broadens discipline-specific writing away from a narrow focus on biography and avoids using objects as mere illustrations.

While each chapter can stand alone, reading them in relation to the other chapter in its respective part is productive and demonstrates how resonance is an active state: the research, reflection, and questioning is never complete. For example, chapter two can be read as a standalone, but reading it in relation to chapter one, as a type of resonant

response to my retrospective Cicansky-related research, demonstrates a post-curatorial and/or post-research process I intend to employ again in the future. Identifying and then thinking through absence in a creative way has revealed a number of biases and blind spots I had accepted and justified during the research and curatorial phases of the Cicansky projects. I intend to use this process, including Prown's emotively deductive methodology, during the research phase of any given project in the future to give myself permission, so to speak, to embark upon resonant and wondrous flights of fancy and discovery.

The biggest surprise coming out of this research was a misunderstanding I had going into it regarding modernism and the 1960s. Altglass was established in Medicine Hat, AB in the 1950s when Modernism was in a state of flux on the Prairies. In "The Roots of Modernism in Saskatchewan," architect Bernard Flaman argues that "Saskatchewan itself could be viewed as a Modernist project, one based on the ideas of mechanized agriculture, railway transportation and the control and modification of the natural environment."<sup>3</sup> He also points out that throughout the 1950s and 1960s, architectural Modernism was the dominant style for new buildings.<sup>4</sup> By extension, this term can also be applied to craft of the time. My original intentions were to examine what about the Prairies and the Modern condition seems so complementary, giving rise to a cultural mindset that persists into the present day. Characterized by a mechanized agricultural economy, a grid-like organization of space, and a long history of demolishing aging sectors of the built environment, the Canadian Prairies are still very much in a Modern frame of mind and so was I. As Rod Bantjes notes in *Improved Earth: Prairie Space as Modern Artefact, 1869–1944*, "Modernism was about both innovation within a frame as well as the reflexive critique of that frame and willingness to revolutionize it and supplant it with another."<sup>5</sup>

However, as I dove deeper into the case studies, it became apparent a modern framework or frame of mind is only part of the picture. I had originally thought the Regina Clay ceramists, and Cicansky in particular, were most productive in the late 1960s and the very early 1970s and the studio glass movement on the prairies occurred at roughly the same time. While it is true objects were made in the late 1960s, I did not consider the continued activities of both Cicansky and Prairie glass blowers during the

rest of the 1970s. This in turn, caused me to frame my thoughts in relation to developments in the 1950s and 1960s in craft, art, and architecture and not to developments of the late 1970s and 1980s.

In both cases—Cicansky and studio glass—curator Andrew Blauvelt’s concept of the “hippie modern” is more accurate as it describes a moment during the counterculture movement between 1964 and 1974 where the utopic impulses of modernism were swept away in favour of spirituality, healing, and technology while also being impacted by the social upheavals such as the oil crisis of the early 1970s leading to dramatic differences from the preceding decades.<sup>6</sup> This hippie modern moment and aesthetic emerged within Canadian Prairie craft due to its strong ties to the counter culture movement of the United States and especially California. I have emphasized this long-standing connection between American and Canadian crafts by deliberately citing a number of influential American craft exhibitions and publications within the introduction and throughout the chapters. This is a point made numerous times by Canadian craft historian Sandra Alfody: “it cannot be denied that the introduction of US ideologies into Canadian craft education resulted in the training of craftspeople who have proven to be articulate with modern art sensibilities but who remain devoted to the forms and materials of craft.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it is important to look south of the border while also contextualizing the objects with broader contemporary cultural developments, and I came to this conclusion while writing this dissertation.

A hippie modern moment on the Prairies exists, to paraphrase the quote at the beginning of this conclusion, between modernism’s “new” utopic-framed visions on the world and postmodernism’s shattered mirrors. Continuing with this metaphor, tools were needed to shatter these framed visions and mirrors, and it was during this hippie modernist moment that mirror-shattering tools were formed: early studio glass, protobobjects and Cicansky’s domestically themed objects. Curators Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt point out in *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970–1990* that postmodernism inhabited the borders of practice.<sup>8</sup> The processes covered in this dissertation do exactly that, signalling how important the activities of Cicansky, Kaufman, and Thorkelsson were to the development of postmodernism on the Prairies.

Adamson and Pavitt also state that “With a few exceptions in recent years, histories of postmodernism are surprisingly scarce.”<sup>9</sup> This is even more accurate for studies and accounts of postmodern craft on the Canadian Prairies. While much can be said and has been said about Cicansky’s relationship to modern Prairie painters, the same cannot be said as to how he relates to other early forms of postmodern craft. This for me is the next resonant flight, inspired by this dissertation, and it will begin with a study of woven textiles on the Prairies from 1967 to 1990 with key figures such as Magreet van Walsem (1923–1979), Kaija Sanelma Harris, and the rug hookers of the Sioux Handicraft Co-operative of Saskatchewan. How might these woven and hooked works relate to ceramics and glass? What does the early Prairie postmodern crafted oeuvre entail, and how does it relate to its past and future? How does postmodern craft relate to art, architecture, and design on the Prairies? These are all resonant lines of flight to embark upon now that I have indisciplined object-inspired methodologies in my tool belt.

There is obviously so much more to discover, study, and think through from a historical, theoretical, and material culture perspective. For this dissertation, I felt it was necessary to focus in on particular case studies in order to formulate and test indisciplined object-inspired approaches to the material and objects themselves. My goal, by grounding this study in the objects and their respective disciplines, is to create an indisciplined language that will allow others to make sense of and share my passion for the crafted world. I conclude, as I did so with “Prairie Pots and Beyond,” acutely aware of how much more I could say and how much more remains to be done. Embrace the resonance and wonder and take a step through that doorway between the past, present, and future.

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<sup>1</sup> Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt, “Postmodernism: Style and Subversion,” in *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970–1990*, eds. Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007), 168–169.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Flaman, *Character and Controversy: The Mendel Art Gallery and Modernist Architecture in Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 2004), 33.

<sup>4</sup> Flaman, *Character and Controversy*, 33.

<sup>5</sup> Rod Bantjes, *Improved Earth: Prairie Space as Modern Artefact, 1869–1944* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Blauvelt, “Preface,” in *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, ed. Andrew Blauvelt (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2016), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Sandra Alfoldy, *Crafting Identity: The Development of Professional Fine Craft in Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Adamson and Pavitt, “Postmodernism,” 19.

<sup>9</sup> Adamson and Pavitt, “Curators’ Foreword,” in *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970–1990*, eds. Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), 10.

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## Curriculum Vitae

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**Selected Publications:**

Krueger, Julia. "A Feminist Lens on Six Female Ceramists in Regina." *Regina Clay: Worlds in the Making*. MacKenzie Art Gallery, edited by Timothy Long, 51–57. Regina, SK: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2005.

Krueger, Julia. "Passing the Torch: Four Canadian Studio Glass Educators." *Crafting New Traditions: Canadian Innovators and Influence*, edited by Melanie Egan, Alan C. Elder and Jean Johnson, 35–46. Gatineau, QC: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2008.

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