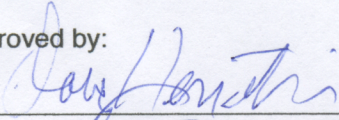


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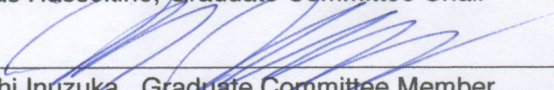
By
Reem Gibriel

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Al-Fateh University, 1995
Masters of Studio Arts (ceramics), 2008
Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts
School of Art and Design
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan
November 25th 2010

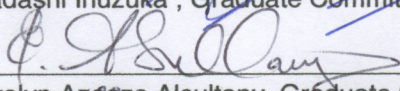
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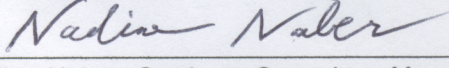
Douglas Hasseltine, Graduate Committee Chair



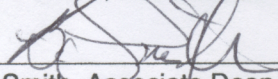
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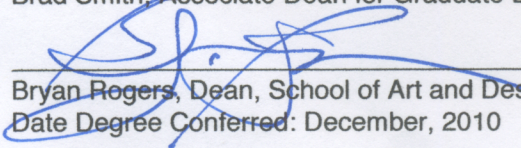
Evelyn Azaza Alsultany, Graduate Committee Member



Nadine Naber, Graduate Committee Member



Brad Smith, Associate Dean for Graduate Education



Bryan Rogers, Dean, School of Art and Design
Date Degree Conferred: December, 2010

METAMPHORAE
FROM EMOTION TO METAPHOR
FROM SENTIMENT TO SYMBOL

REEM GIBRIEL

Thesis for the Masters of Fine Art,
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
2010

Abstract

MetAmphorae chronicles the evolution of MetAmphorae, and Personae, the two installations inspired by the war on Gaza (2008–2009), which served as my thesis show(s), along with an earlier installation which was a precursor to both. I will present the research I conducted to arrive at the appropriate forms for these installations, and the history of my intuitions in conceiving and making them. Inspired by emotionally impacting political circumstances, the art projects discussed in this thesis investigate my attempt to harness emotion into metaphor, and to reshape personal sentiment into universal symbol.

Keywords: Ceramics, Installation, disintegration, Amphorae, Time, Intervention, Sentimental art, Symbols, Metaphor, War, Victims, Gaza.

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FOREWORD

In this, the written part of my thesis, I'm inviting you to navigate with me the several steps I took to finally create my thesis shows. I begin with threads of my thoughts, emotions, influences and my research. And together I hope they represent a screen on which the whole story is told.

On the left side of the page I posted my findings—excerpts, images, and other information that enlightened and affected my work. On the right side of the page you will read history of my intuitions in this project and this time of my life, my emotions and reactions, how they became my artistic objectives.

In the way that many autobiographies start with the author's first memory, I go back to the beginnings of the war on Gaza (December 2008-January 2009), which started the whole process. It was a time when the invisible distance between my colleagues and me became visible, when what was occupying my thoughts was continents away from what occupied theirs. I begin therefore with a time of personal discovery that was rooted political and social circumstances.

In the second part of the text I walk you through my first artistic response to the war, "The Samounis" the first realized installation to come out of the process. In making the Samouni figures I had to address my emotional struggle with the images of the war on Gaza and my steps to defy the effects of sentimentality on my work. I also address the rationale that led me to the amphora, the symbol I used in my final installations.

The third chapter contains the bulk of my research. As I write about my fascination of the two-handled amphora, I add on the left side of the page, excerpts from the references that helped convince me that the amphorae must indeed be my visual symbol.

Finally, in last two chapters I present my final projects, the two installations that composed my thesis shows. I present them as act I, "MetAmphorae" and act II "Personae." Two acts of intervention and interruption to our ordinance. My trip from the disruption of the war to the release of the metaphor.

MetAmphorae

Gaza



White phosphorus bombs light up the Gaza sky .



Inauguration fireworks at the Capitol. January 20th, 2009.

I was enjoying the end of an exhausting year and looking forward to spending a few uninterrupted weeks with Salma, my daughter.

I remember, the news of the war on Gaza sneaking into my consciousness and ultimately, seizing my thoughts.

She said, "The news are very depressing. I stopped listening to the news."

I remember thinking, "What if it's your reality?"

January 2009, the inauguration: They are cheering.

Earlier, in November 08,
I was excited that America elected its first African American President.

Now, I am disappointed. It doesn't seem different.



Sucked into the black hole of YouTube,
watching news reports of Aljazeera and BBC,
I remember feeling disconnected from the community
around me.

"This is even more depressing than the news on *our* media!" She said.

I saw an image; a woman holding her dead child.
She was walking out of the morgue
carrying her loss in her arms.

I thought of the loneliness this mother must have felt as she
looked and wept straight at the camera that carried her
image to millions of people who could feel only a fraction
of her sense of loss.

Wrapped in a kafan, her child was no longer alive,
but it was a loss that had been contained and that
she could hold on to for some time, until the burial.

I was drawn to this image, amazed at how
it entrapped the viewer in a space and time
between the solitude of a personal trauma
and the mass exposure of grief.

The image is mass-produced, but the trauma remains
personal.

There was a watermark on the image that said "Not for public use."

The kafan is kind of
a cerement. It is
made up of three
layers of simple
white cotton fabric
that Muslims use to
wrap the dead
before burying
them.



Some of the bodies of Gaza's
victims. Four ropes are wrapped
tightly around the kafan to
keep it tightly wrapped. They
are removed when the body is
laid in the grave.



The process of wrapping the newspaper form.



The wrapped infant.

In her essay "Brutality and Sentimentality" Mary Midgley asserts that "being sentimental involves misrepresenting the world in order to indulge into our feeling." *Philosophy* Vol. 54, No. 209 (1979), p. 385-389

M. Tanner argues that in sentimentality feelings lose their connection with their original source or cause and are now created by the person simply in order to maintain a pleasant emotion. *Sentimentality. Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, (1976-77), P.124-147.*

I wondered how it felt to hold your own dead child in your hands.
But a part of me certainly didn't want to know.

I didn't have any ideas or plans for artwork. I, as a person, not as an artist, wanted to make a form that represented the dead child.

I crumbled newspapers and shaped them into form of an infant, wrapped it in a white cotton fabric just like the one used for the kafan.

I remember feeling drained after finishing the paper and clay baby.

The paper form was easy to make, but the wrapping was stressful.

I held the baby in my arms.

I realized I needed more time to reflect and decide on possible next steps if I wanted to make art out of this experience.

The Samounis

“Our Hidden brain is not very good in comprehending a large scale disaster and our empathetic systems are designed to focus on the blight of individual others. We need a face, a name, a story to latch on to, around which we can wrap our empathy.”

--Shankar Vedantam
NPR Interview with Diane Rehm.
<http://thedianerehmshow.org/shows/2010-01-26/shankar-vedantamhidden-brain>

“Our Victims Are Stories, Theirs Are Mere Numbers,” a headline of an article by the Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz, Ha’aretz, 10/03/2000

On January 6, 2009, in the Zeitoun neighborhood, north of Gaza City, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) herded members of the Samouni extended family into one house.

On the following day, the same contingent of soldiers, shelled the house with missiles. Twenty-nine members of the Samouni family were killed.



Members of the Samouni family gather amid the wreckage of what was once their home in the Zeitoun neighborhood, north of Gaza City (January 2009).

I thought, maybe working on another project – a different project that won’t involve holding a dead child in my hands and a different medium altogether – would allow me time to think clearly, ease a little of the stress, and give me a better perspective on what to do next.

Move to another project, yes, but apparently I could not change the subject.

The next project was the Samouni family installation.

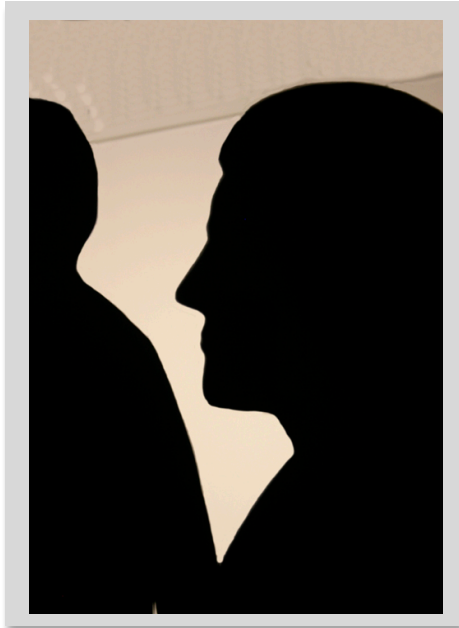
I remember being overwhelmed by the number of victims. I remember going through the list of the victims of the Gaza war.

The “Samouni” name kept coming up.

What is the story of the Samounis? Why so many of them? And no story.

Twenty nine victims of the same family!

I started counting my family.
One grandmother still alive, Mom, Dad, a brother, four sisters, six nieces and eight nephews, nine aunts, seven uncles, sixty four cousins
Trying to comprehend this loss.



I created twenty-seven life-size figures for the Samouni installation, two of them holding infants. I made them out of tarpaper.

I wanted to introduce the vast spaces of absence that have marked the lives of the Palestinians. I wanted them to invade our space, to interrupt our peace whether we knew the story or if we stopped listening to the news.

I wanted to question our participation and contribution, or rather our physical presence, in the midst of such suffering and annihilation.

I did not want to give the living a chance to speak of the dead. I wanted to spur the livings to interrogate their conduct in the presence of the dead.

"Every time I look at them from the outside, I think there's a party going on."

"You know, these figures, they're beginning to spook me."



After the Samouni installation,
I felt it was time to go back to the babies.

I made another wrapped infant.
Again, I held the baby in my arms.
I recognized that holding this dead clay child will always
evoke a pain that I cannot handle.

"Dead baby is literal," one of my professors said.

But don't we sometimes need "the literal"?

Literal, in this case. is very painful.

But I need someone to hear my voice, no matter how painful.

Painful shuts audiences off.

I could not afford to have the audience shut me off.

It made sense to move away from the infant figure,
but I was still taken by the fabric and the wrapping process.

I started looking for a different metaphor.

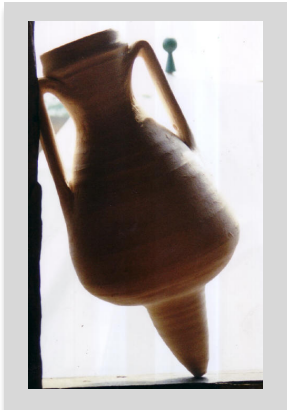
With my mind loaded with images of the Gaza victims,
I started researching Gaza's history and the culture of the
Palestinians.

I looked at symbols the Palestinians have adopted as emblems of their homeland and nation:

The kaffiyeh and its pattern,
a child hurling a stone at Israeli soldiers,
the map of Palestine,
the Palestinian needle work,
all are over-used.

They will be familiar, just like the news.

The Amphora



"Storage jars in ancient sea trade" Avshalom Zemer

National Maritime Museum, Haifa 1977. A collection of Canaanite Amphorae, some of them owned by an Israeli family. The Israeli family dedicated this book to their son who lost his life when his tank was hit by Egyptian artillery in Israeli-occupied Sinai during the 10th of Ramadan/Yom Kippur war, in 1973.

"Make vessels!" said one of my professors.

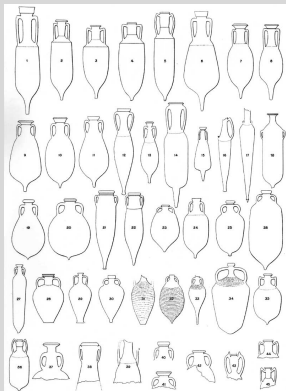
But I refused to make vessels in response to the Gaza war. I refused to make a vessel period. I always identified with sculptors, not potters. Making a vessel is what usually expected from a clay artist, but not me.

Until I saw a book about Palestinian amphorae.

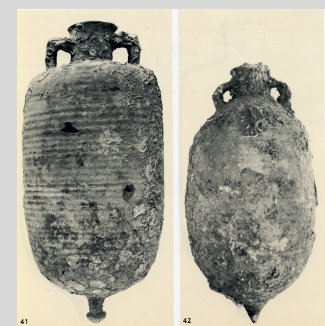
I remember a trip I made in 2002. I went to Apollonia, Libya, my ancestral hometown, to visit family. In the town's little archaeology museum I saw a poster of almost sixty different Amphorae.

I remember being fascinated by these pointed-bottom vessels and their variations.

This fascination returned when I began to examine a book on Palestinian amphorae. I recalled the visit to Apollonia and the family members I saw then. The combination and the circle of associations excited me.

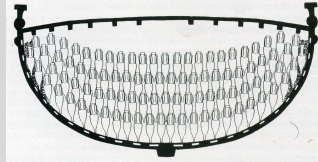


The Dressle Chart, named after its maker, by historian Heinrich Dressel. The chart was published in the late 19th century. Commercial Amphoras of Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology, Alpozen, Ozdas, Berkaya. Bodrum Museum 1995.



A couple of the amphorae from "Storage jars in ancient sea trade"

Transportation amphorae were made to be dispatched around the world. The same pointed bottom that roots them in the ground helped to store as many of them as possible on the ship.



Amphorae stowed in the hull, stacked upon each other. Commercial Amphoras of Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology, Alpozen, Ozdas, Berkaya. Bodrum Museum 1995.

Once an amphora was filled with wine or some other commodity, it was plugged with a wood, chipped stone, or clay stopper, which was then sealed with pitch and secured by a cloth cover. Amphorae for export were loaded onto ships, stacked with the pointed toe of one wedged between the rounded shoulders of its neighbors, and then protected with a blanket of straw. Typically, a ship made many stops, unloading part of its cargo of amphorae and taking on a new supply. To unload an amphora at the port, a dockworker grasped one of its two handles and its knob-like toe, or its third "handle," to lift it.

Amphora Journal Vol. 1 • Issue 1 • Spring 2002

Amphora workshops dotted the Mediterranean, from the Atlantic coast of Morocco to the north shore of the Black Sea, and each region produced its own traditional forms of amphorae. For example, those potted on the island of Chios (see Fig. 1) during the late sixth and much of the fifth century B.C. had such a distinctive bulge at the neck that Chian coins used these jars as a symbol for the city. Jars from Thasos (see Fig. 2), in contrast, had a much more angular shape. Mark Lawall, The amphora and ancient commerce, Amphora Journal Vol. 1 • Issue 1 • Spring 2002

Transportation Amphorae are visually interesting vessels, conceptually charged objects, but they are vessels nonetheless.

The first question I had about the amphorae was regarding the pointed bottom. Then the answer came as another question:

Don't we all need land to stand on? A land to root ourselves in?

Amphorae need ground, dirt, raw land to stand in to be stable.

Unfortunately the land usually was not their homeland.

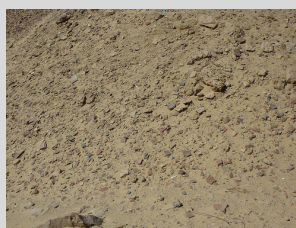
Looking at amphorae, I began to see a refugee's longing to be re-implanted in his homeland.

I see exile and dissolution.

But their individual shapes recalls their origin!

And holding an amphora that I made, I began to feel the child.

Both Corinthian amphorae and amphorae from the Adriatic that passed through Corinth en route to Athens appear in Athens during times of hostility and friendship between the two cities.



Amphorae shreds at Karanis, Egypt.
Photo by John Kanenburg.



Monte Testaccio, The eighth hill of Rome.

In the Roman world, where few storage facilities were available, householders reused empty shipping amphoras for the storage of a wide variety of items, from fruit to eggs. Pompeii is full of jars reused for storage, carefully labeled as to contents. But even a city the size of Rome could not reuse all its amphoras for storage. The Romans, therefore, needed to break into pieces the ones that no one wanted. There were limits also on how many amphora fragments could be reused in building even though the building industry depended heavily on broken amphoras as a component of the cores of walls. As a consequence, Monte Testaccio, the "eighth hill of Rome," grew up gradually along the Tiber just inside the Aurelian Wall. Elizabeth Lyding Will, From Italy to India: Mediterranean amphoras and Roman economic history, *The Amphora Journal*, Vol. 2 • Issue 2 • Fall 2003

I imagined a ship being loaded with amphorae full of olive oil.

The man who owns the press that produced the oil is happy.

I imagined the merchant who was looking forward to ship those amphorae to their destination and finish the deal.

I imagined the amphorae unloaded in another city, placed carefully on a cart.

I imagined a woman going to a seller to get some olive oil to cook for her family.

I thought of the connections between these different people and the connections between the shores and ports that this ship will visit.

The amphora can travel a long way and stop in many places before it reaches its final destination.

The trade did not stop even during war.

I thought of an amphora, after it was emptied of all it contained. In Rome they took it to Monte Testaccio. They threw it into a pile of other amphorae where it broke into pieces.

Everywhere else amphorae were made to have a similar end, every city could have had its own Monte Testaccio, its pile of broken amphorae.

Amphorae vessels, believed to be of North African origin, lie on the seabed off the coast of Ventotene, a tiny island between Rome and Naples, Italy. Archaeology officials say they have found five well-preserved Roman shipwrecks there, with their cargo of amphorae, pots and other objects largely intact. They date from the 1st century B.C. to the 4th century A.D.



<http://news.therecord.com/article/574978>

But there is another end to the amphorae story.

I imagined the merchant being informed that the ship sank.
Or maybe he waited until he lost hope of its arrival.

I imagined the woman going to the seller and not finding
the oil she needed.

I thought of all the ports that were waiting for these
amphorae.

What has survived for us is this loss:
the numerous sunken ships and their loads of amphorae
discovered on the seabed of the Mediterranean.

The failure of the amphorae to arrive grants them
immortality.

And they are here, in museums or under water,
telling us the stories of their world.



A standard Canaanite amphora reconstructed from shreds found in Amarna, South Egypt.

The transportation amphorae are falsely known as Greek or Roman vessels.

The truth is the Canaanites, the inhabitants of historical Palestine, were the first makers of the transportation kind of the vessel. "The double handled commercial amphora employed by maritime trading was started by the Canaanites who were powerful in the eastern Mediterranean" Commercial Amphoras of Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology, Alpozen, Ozdas, Berkaya. Bodrum Museum 1995.

"In Crete bodies of dead children, arranged in a foetal position, were placed in amphorae which, in this instance, would seem to have been symbols of the source of physical and intellectual life, the mother's womb. They provided a sort of return to one's beginnings." *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, 1996, p. 553.

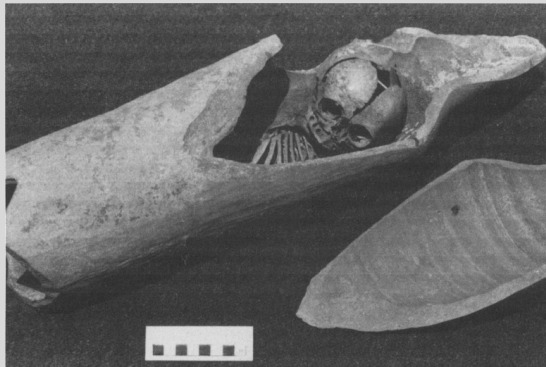


Plate 4 Infant Burial No. 1 within late Roman spatheion amphora, reassembled by Walter Birkby (Noelle Soren).

World Archaeology, Vol. 35, No. 2, Archaeology of Epidemic and Infectious Disease (Oct., 2003), pp. 193-209 Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

What brought everything together for me was more than the idea of exile and the connections that the amphorae presented and stood for.

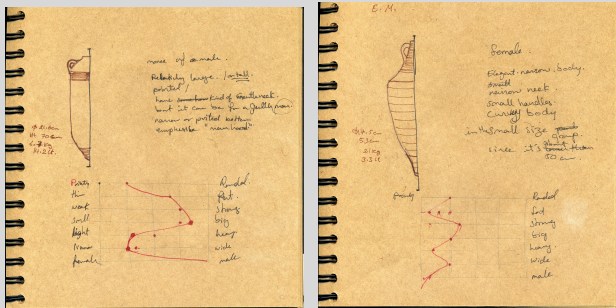
More than the bittersweet irony of non-arrival as survival.

Amphorae were Canaanites!

And Amphorae were the final resting place of many infants.

I wrote down this scene of burial in Canaan:

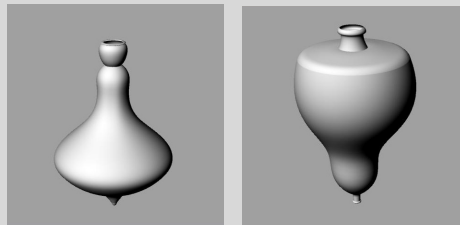
Then he took the child from her arms, adjusted it to the fetal position then placed it in the amphora. He placed the amphora in the tiny grave, recited a short prayer while the mourners listened and then poured dirt over the amphora/child. Finally she, the woman from Gaza, buried her loss, her child.



Two of forty analysis charts I made to explore various facets of the many different amphorae shapes.



Some of the amphorae I made to explore how various vessels were made and how it felt to hold them.



Computer-generated shapes using Rhino 3D . Also part of my shape study.

Before clay and fabric comes shape.

What shape will the amphorae be?

Do they belong to a certain place?

What kind of space will they make together?

I think of them as citizens of the same land.

I wanted them to be similar yet different.

I knew I wanted them to have that pointed bottom, with different shoulders and necks.

Finally,
the shapes are decided. moulds are made.



Ken Yonetani's installation at CSIRO Discovery, Australia in 2003.

I was inspired by Ken Yonetani, who laid 2,000 ceramic tiles engraved with images of endangered butterflies, under his audiences' feet. Yonetani's tiles were a confrontational and immediate statement on the fragility of the environment on which we tread, and the destruction that humans leave in their path.
<http://www.kenyonetani.com/>

Ken Yonetani's tiles introduced me to the Fumie tiles. Originally Fumie was a trampling board made up of medals or statues that featured images of Jesus Christ confiscated from Japanese converts to Christianity in the 18th century. Those suspected of being Christian were forced to trample on the images as proof of their renunciation of their faith. As the system of Fumie became entrenched, official bronze tablets depicting Jesus' image were made especially out of brass and other materials specifically to be trampled upon.



Right: A clay and seashells cylinder fired and placed in room environment (humidity varies from 30%- 70%) November 2009.
Middle: The same cylinder after 24 hours.
Left: The same cylinder after 26 hours.

Now, during the time of making and constructing, I begin to ask myself:

Do I really want to construct?
Which end will my amphorae face?
The seabed or Monte Testaccion?

Tripoli, 1995.

I remember going to the beach and coming back with bags of sand.

I remember mixing all my clay with the beach sand.

We always remember a big loss.

I made several pieces with that clay.

A day after firing the pieces began cracking, then breaking.

I was left with piles of broken fired clay.

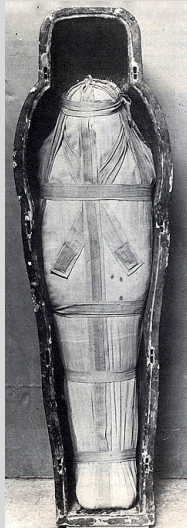
And buckets of unusable clay.

Making my amphorae, I wanted to repeat that experience. I wanted to call on the power of disintegration and loss.



Roughly wrapped mummy of a baboon. The mummy is from the royal cache of mummies at Dier el-Bahri (from 1050 B.C.), Cairo Museum.

-- *Egyptian Mummies*
Carol Andrews, British Museum Press. 1992.



A mummy of a young woman 990-960 B.C. Isiemkheb-D, the wife of Pinudjem II. Cairo Museum.

<http://anubis4.2000.tripod.com/mummypages1/21B.htm>



Left: Elaborate wrapping of the mummy of a cat. *National Geographic*. (<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2009/11/animal-mummies/barnes-photography>)



Right: the neck of one of my amphorae.

I dipped some strips of fabric in clay mixed with ground-up seashells, and others in clay only. I laid the fabric strips in the mould, I made my first amphora.

Although made with clay and fabric and laid inside the mould as I'd envisioned, something wasn't right.

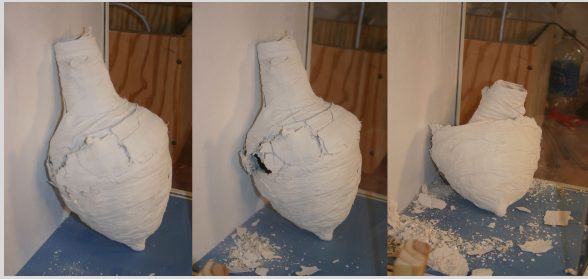
I wanted these strips to encircle something, to wrap it, rather than being simply placed on top of it. I wanted to create pieces that combined the amphorae and the kafan.

I hang the amphorae and then wrap them again with thinner strips of fabric dipped in clay.

I begin to develop patterns for the strips as I lay them on top of each other.

Was I mimicking patterns of folded fabric?
Are they dresses? Or are they elaborate mummies?

I realized that I was in fact creating mummies, and with the amphora bearing these shapes, that I am mummifying emptiness.



In an enclosed environment with induced humidity the amphora collapsed in six hours. A controlled small humidifier hidden under the display base moistened the air within the display thus causing the collapse of each amphora. The control of humidity at different levels assured that the amphorae collapsed at different intervals.

Amphorae 1, New Year's Eve 2010.
The first anniversary of the Gaza war.

I spend the first hours of the New Year watching my first amphora fall apart.
At 4:00 a.m. it collapses.



This Amphora placed on a table in room humidity and temperature levels took three weeks to collapse. The sections of the clay that caused the break are the ones that contained ground seashells.

Amphora 2, I watched her crumble day after day.

In room environment it kept shedding pieces for three weeks.

MetAmphorae



MetAmphorae: the first day of the installation.



Act one
Metamphorae

Twenty five of my mummified amphorae hang in the air,
neither rising nor touching the ground.

Floating in a liminal space, where stability is a luxury.

In a static situation, they look unstable and weak, yet
haunting.

Every day, new fragments fall and break the reflections the
other amphorae cast on the shiny floor.

Hung and falling apart,
alive and dying,
I wanted them to interrupt conventional space,
to evoke another,
a space where security is almost a myth.

She said, "They are haunting, I will stop by everyday to see them."

I wonder why you kept coming to see them?
To watch them break?
Was it amusing? Or saddening? Or was it mere curiosity?



"Is it ok if I break one," he asks.

But I hoped someone would try to rescue them.

She says, "I feel I want to hold them, to make sure they don't fall."





PERSONAE





Act two

Personae

Why not show them in a museum?

Again, the idea of interrupting another space.

I remember my first trip to a museum. I think I was six years old. My father took us to an archeology museum. He kept saying, "Do not touch anything. Be careful."

I enter museums now with his warning in mind. I feel a mix of awe and anxiety towards the artifacts. I feel I should be on my best behavior, quiet and respectful. I am aware of every move I make.

At the Kelsey museum of Archaeology, I walk around the new wing.

Archaeological pieces within certain epochs are grouped together. Enclosed within their time.

The amphorae are there,
stationary objects
yet active witnesses of history.
And evidence of our endless efforts to preserve the past.



The Tate Gallery asked Cornelia Parker to preserve her piece Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View (1991). They were wondering if the wooden pieces have any worms. "I wish they have," she said. Cold Dark Matter is an installation of remnants from an exploded farm shed. Image : www.tate.org.uk Text: cornelia parker by Bruce Ferguson, Jill Medvedow, Cornelia Parker, edited by Jessica Morgan.

Let me introduce you to my cast of amphorae:

Azza Al-Samouni, 2010, Gaza.
 Armin Kamatic, 1993, Bosnia.
 Kivork Zurbayan, 1915, Armenia.
 Levi Abakanowicz, 1944, Poland.
 Hassan Al Naboulsi, 1982, Lebanon.
 Fidèle Ingabire, 1994, Rwanda.
 Ibrahim Adam Osman, 2003, Sudan.
 Bernardin Kambanda, 1994, Rwanda.
 and Vedin Kavazovic, 1993, Bosnia.

All are real, lost lives. My Amphorae bore their names names.

"All these names come from troubled areas!" he said.

The fragile amphorae are again alive and dying.

They are intruders on the Kelsey archaeological atmosphere.

The clear acrylic cases, exact replicas of those encasing the Kelsey's "real" amphorae, are deceptively protecting my amphorae.

What do we value?

To what extent do we go in order to preserve?



I meant for my amphorae to evoke and probe our efforts to save lives in other places.

Question all our acts of rescue and preservation.

If the past is another place my amphorae come from the past to recall contemporary places.

Places where perpetual loss is the norm.
Where value has a different definition.





The amphorae break to release their questions.