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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO  
Greeley, Colorado  
The Graduate School

VITALITY OF WATER/VITALIDAD DEL AGUA: OUR  
SACRED CONNECTION TO WATER AND HOW WE  
CAN INTERPRET THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER  
THROUGH ARTISTIC INQUIRY

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Jenifer Fogarty

College of Performing and Visual Arts  
School of Art and Design  
Program of Art Education

December 2018

This Thesis by: Jenifer Fogarty

Entitled: *Vitality of Water/Vitalidad del Agua: Our Sacred Connection to Water and How We Can Interpret the Importance of Water Through Artistic Inquiry*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in College of Performing and Visual Arts in School of Art and Design, Program of Art Education

Accepted by the Thesis Committee:

---

Connie Stewart, Ph.D., Co-Chair

---

Donna Goodwin, Ph.D., Co-Chair

Accepted by the Graduate School

---

Linda L. Black, Ed.D.  
Associate Provost and Dean  
Graduate School and International Admissions  
Research and Sponsored Projects

## ABSTRACT

Fogarty, Jenifer. *Vitality of Water/Vitalidad del Agua: Our Sacred Connection to Water and How We Can Interpret the Importance of Water Through Artistic Inquiry*. Unpublished Master of Arts thesis, University of Northern Colorado, 2018.

Water has appeared in the work and study of artists for centuries. There are countless aspects of water to be explored, from the sheer physical qualities of water to the spiritual, political, and practical associations with water. Water is what gives us life, and yet the vitality of this precious resource has been threatened over time. This exploration highlights important aspects of the study of water through art-making. My exploration began in the studio while making my own work. I sought to create a multi-sensory environment where viewers could participate and be immersed in the work itself. The site-specific installation was meant to be a celebration of the beauty of water and also recognition of the destruction of water. The work featured 10 copper skeletons that I shaped and soldered together, which symbolized life and death. The copper forms were set amongst an array of wet-felted forms, sculpted wire manta rays, video, and sound. This study discusses my arts-based research within a continuum of historic and contemporary artists and researchers who have also explored the theme of water ecology. In my role as an a/r/tographer or artist, researcher, and teacher, I discuss my personal connections to water, why I chose to create this installation, and future applications in the classroom setting.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my amazing wife for all of her help with this project. Her native language is Spanish, so I chose to name the project in both English and Spanish. I would like to thank my thesis advisors at UNC, Dr. Connie Stewart and Dr. Donna Goodwin, for all of their wise advice and support while I was completing this body of work.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

My initial inquiry for *Vitality of Water/Vitalidad del Agua* arose from observing my own art-making practices when experimenting with different mediums. Why did certain qualities come to the surface when I was painting, while other qualities, thoughts, feelings, and ideas emerged in performance or sculpture or installation? I observed what emerged from my own art-making at the University of Northern Colorado, and three main themes emerged: nature, family, and water.

This is an account of a process that unfolded over time. It was a process of making, exploring, researching, reflecting, sorting, more making, observation, and writing. This process often appeared to be tangential and even disordered, but little by little it began to make sense. This work evolved through an arts-based personal inquiry through the multi-faceted lens of an artist, researcher, and teacher or a/r/tographer. “A/r/tography is one of many emerging forms of inquiry that refer to the arts as a way of re-searching the world to enhance understanding” (Irwin et al., 2006, p. 70). The ways of understanding information are often described as a rhizomatic journey that often does not have a linear format or goal to be achieved. The outcome is the documentation of a process of understanding, which is like a meandering root system of a plant. One stream of thought can branch into many directions along the path. Often more questions are raised than answered. “Rhizomatic relations do not seek conclusions” (Irwin et al., 2006, p. 70).

I was inspired by a memory of an art show I had seen years ago at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. The artist completely transformed the space so that it felt as if the viewer was under water. The canopy of water held objects suspended in space, such as an old rowboat and a collection of buoys. If I was under the surface of the ocean, this might be what I would see as I gazed above me. I was not able to find any information about who the artist was, so I was left with my own memory of the sensations I felt at the time. The artist completely transformed the otherwise sterile gallery space into a new environment. Rather than viewing pictures on the wall, the art was an immersive experience of space and place.

This project began to take form when I took a fibers class in the summer of 2016. We were asked to create a list of verbs that might lead to art-making. The verbs I was intrigued with were mending, sheltering, wrapping, comforting, stitching, weaving, flowing, carrying, swaddling, supporting, protecting, and suspending. Making this list and sharing it with my professor was important for me to begin making the work.

I began to create these forms made from used dryer sheets and lint which I had collected for six months (see Figure 1). Soon, what I had were these strange seaweed-like shapes that reminded me of the work of the sculptor, Eva Hesse. I have studied Eva Hesse's work over the years, and her dramatic use of organic and abstract forms have always intrigued me (see Figure 2).



*Figure 1.* Fiber sculpture, Fogarty, 2016.



*Figure 2.* Untitled, Hesse, 1970. From “Hesse’s Sculpture—One Last Look/Artist’s Fragile Works Deteriorating,” by K. Baker, 2002, January 27, *SFGate*, p. 1. <https://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/Hesse-s-sculpture-one-last-look-Artist-s-2879525.php>

When you study visual art for so long, references begin to influence your creative subconscious. I was not initially conscious of this connection when I made these forms, but I made the connection after they were finished. After spending time with these forms, I realized they mimicked kelp forests I had seen along the coastline of California. Soon, I became obsessed with the colors and movement of underwater kelp forests (see Figure 3). But what does a kelp forest represent? It is the safe haven of home, which is a place of nourishment. It is a place that one desires to protect and a place where one can hide.



*Figure 3. Kelp forest habitat. From *Searching for Urchins and Restoring a Kelp Forest* (p. 1), by D. Satzman (2014). <https://curious.kcrw.com/2014/11/searching-for-urchins-and-restoring-a-kelp-forest>*

As I child, I would construct forts and tents out of furniture and blankets—all to create a space of quiet, solitude, and darkness—much like the kelp forests provide for their inhabitants. We all begin life submerged in liquid and darkness. I envisioned the dark exhibition space to be akin to a womb. It was then that I started realizing why I wanted to do this project and why it held personal meaning for me. Water is sacred and vital to all living beings. Our vitality depends upon this precious resource for its survival. The vitality of water touches every living being. I wanted to create an environment of beauty and tranquility with a hint of destruction and decay, because beauty, decay, and destruction co-exist within nature. Some of the decay is via natural processes, while much of it is caused by humans.

I aspired to transform a space into an environment where one could be immersed in stillness and captivated by the visual milieu of water. There is a sense of connection to that which is meaningful, while reflecting on the loss of what is vital. There is a relationship to that which is sacred and life-giving. Within the installation, there are signs of misuse, corruption, and decay. When I would reflect on this precious life-source, a deep sadness emerged. Our waterways are in jeopardy. Plastic is a major contributing material to the demise of our water system, aquatic life forms, and water ecology as a whole.

My primary questions of inquiry were:

- Q1 How has art-making addressed the subject of water ecology throughout the years?
- Q2 How can I visually describe the feeling of safety, beauty, fluidity, and decay?

I have always had a deep connection to water from a very young age. I have always lived close to large bodies of water, and my family taught me to have great regard, care, and reverence for the oceans, rivers, and lakes we enjoyed. My grandmother and I walked along the beaches of Matunuck, Rhode Island, with buckets to pick up trash and various beach treasures that we could use to make art. That reverence is present in the work I created.

Throughout history, artists have created work based on the concept of water. I will highlight a few cultures and practices that have revolved around the theme of water, either for religious, ceremonial, or symbolic reasons. I wanted to provide an interactive experience for viewers to connect deeper to the concept of water. The visual experience was a space of reflection and beauty. The work itself was full of textures, sensations, and metaphors that allude to the cycle of death and rebirth. When

I think about water, many themes and visuals come to mind. The beauty of the meandering river, the vastness of the oceans, and the placid waters of lakes, have all provided me endless hours of reflection, joy, and peace. Each body of water holds different qualities such as movement, reflection, and stillness.

This work developed as a collaborative effort between my wife, my colleagues, and me. The felted pieces and hanging manta ray forms were all made collaboratively. The video was also a collaboration between my wife and me. Prior to the final installation in June 2017, I installed a large prototype in the Oak Room in Crabbe Hall at the University of Northern Colorado as part of a survey course called Place, Space and Time (see Figure 4).



*Figure 4.* Place, Space and Time prototype, Fogarty, 2016.

We constructed the large pod-like forms that were suspended under a canopy, which contained remnants of discarded plastic materials, as a way to call attention to the problematic presence of plastic in our waterways. Figure 5 is a detail of the canopy. I was mesmerized by the feel and weight of the shapes. They reminded me of jellyfish as they float through the water (see Figure 6). Going through this process helped me to develop my concepts and an action plan for the full installation.



*Figure 5.* Detail of Place, Space and Time prototype, Fogarty, 2016.





*Figure 6.* Jellyfish swimming in the sea, Hazeen, n.d.. From *Good Free Photos* (20/31) by O. Hazeen (n.d.). <https://www.goodfreephotos.com/animals/other-animals/jellyfish-swimming.jpg.php>

From my explorations, I knew that my final installation would involve wet felting, metalsmithing, sound, and video projection. I began an independent study with my metalsmithing professor at the University of Northern Colorado, so that I could create the metal forms I envisioned in the fall of 2016. My copper forms evolved from sketches I made in the summer of 2016. See Figures 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 for examples of the beginning sketches prior to the prototype installation.

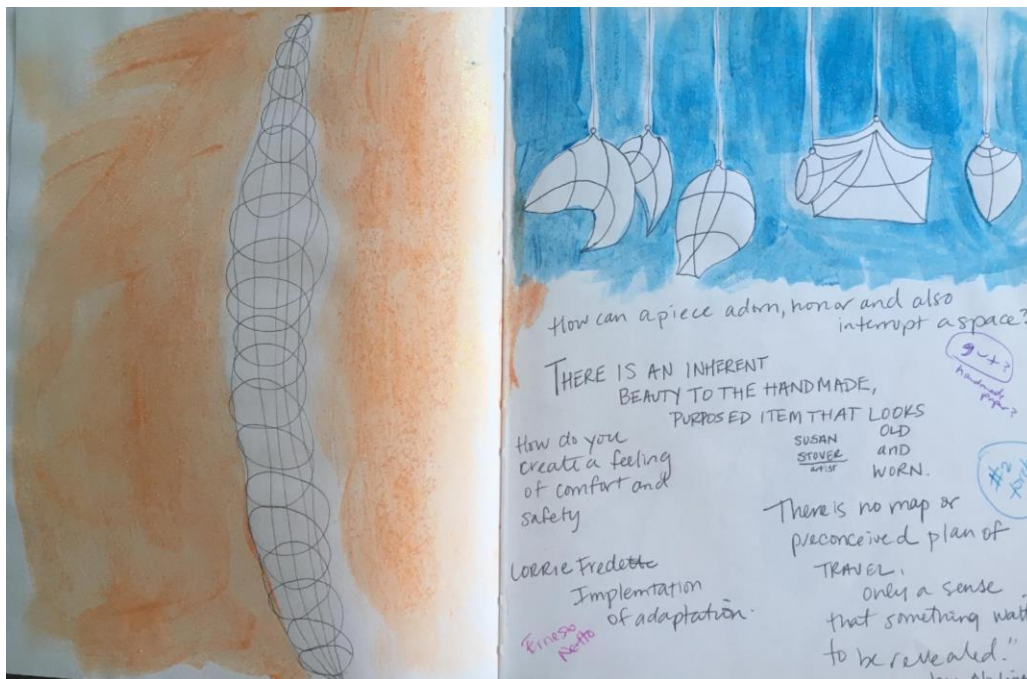


Figure 7. Preliminary sketch 1, Fogarty, 2016.

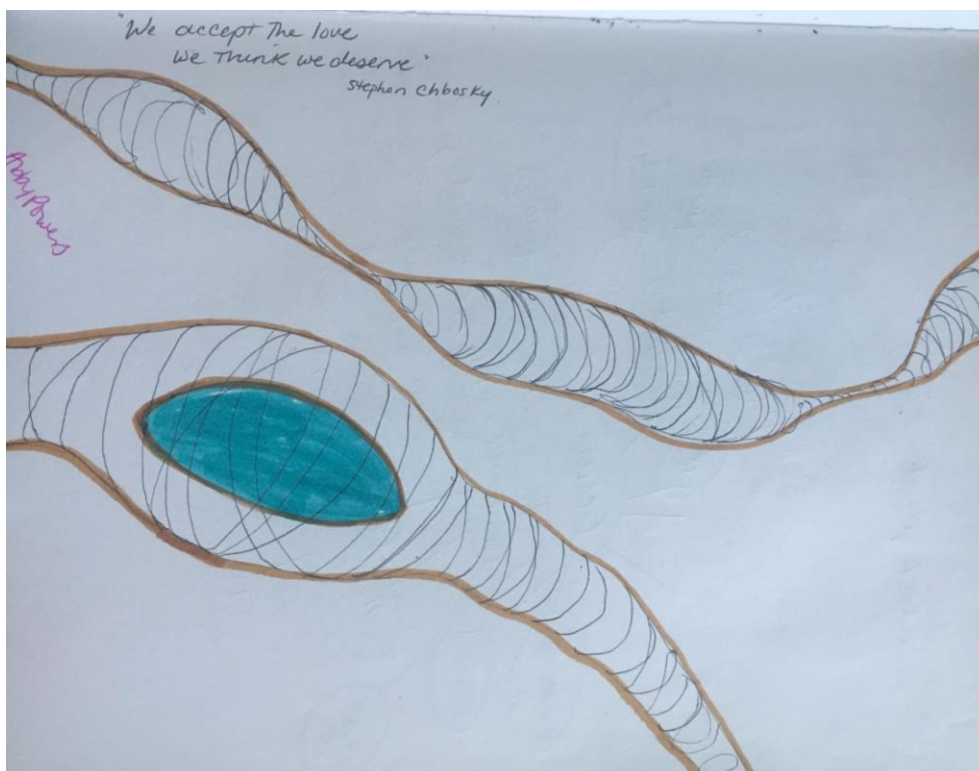


Figure 8. Preliminary sketch 2, Fogarty, 2016.

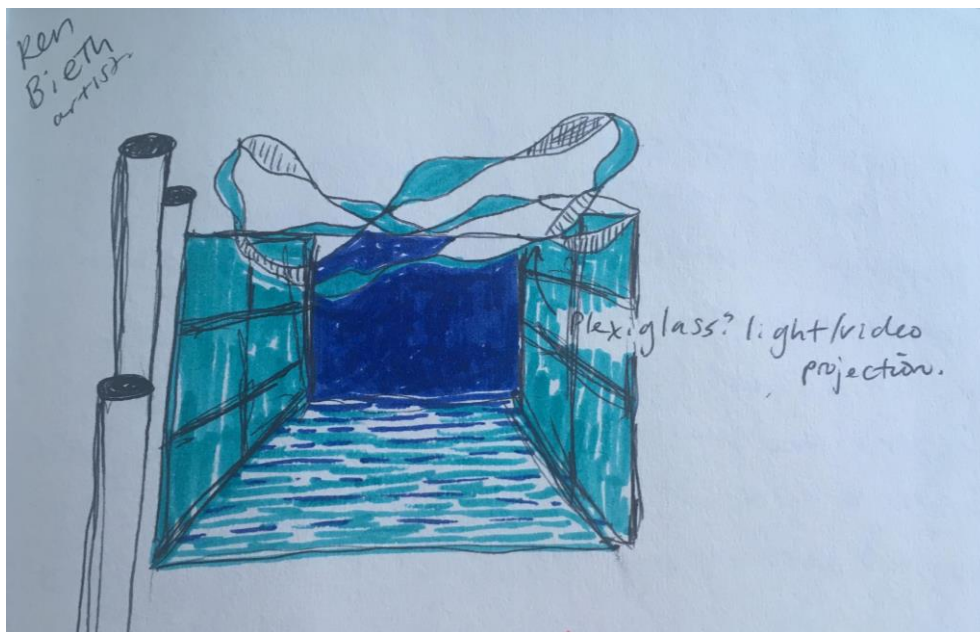


Figure 9. Preliminary sketch of installation space, Fogarty, 2016.

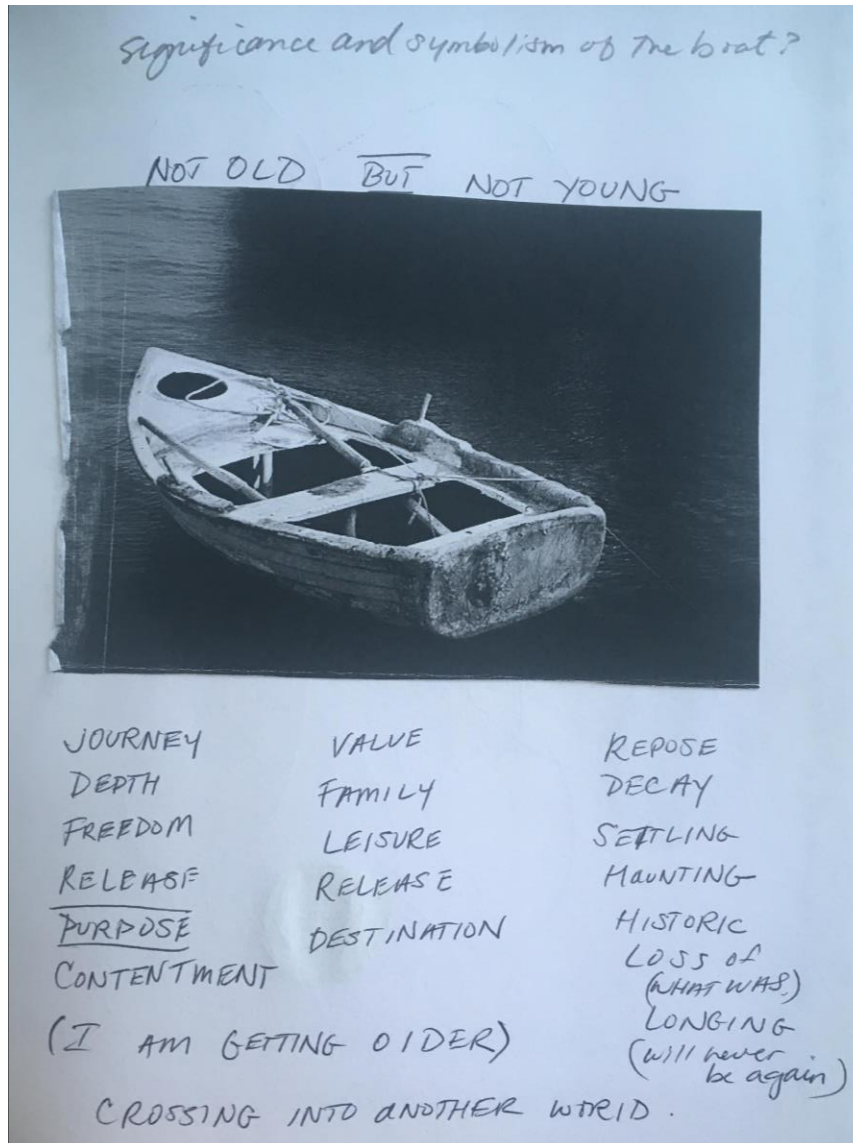


Figure 10. Symbolism of a row boat, Fogarty, 2016.

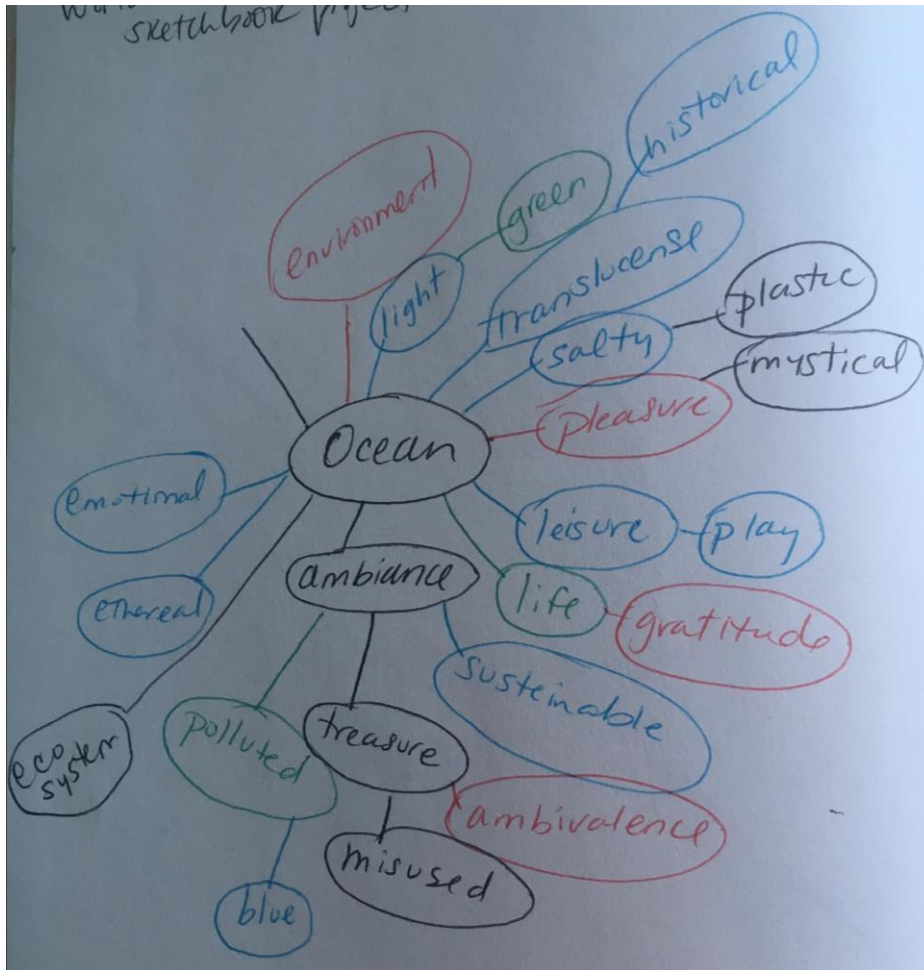
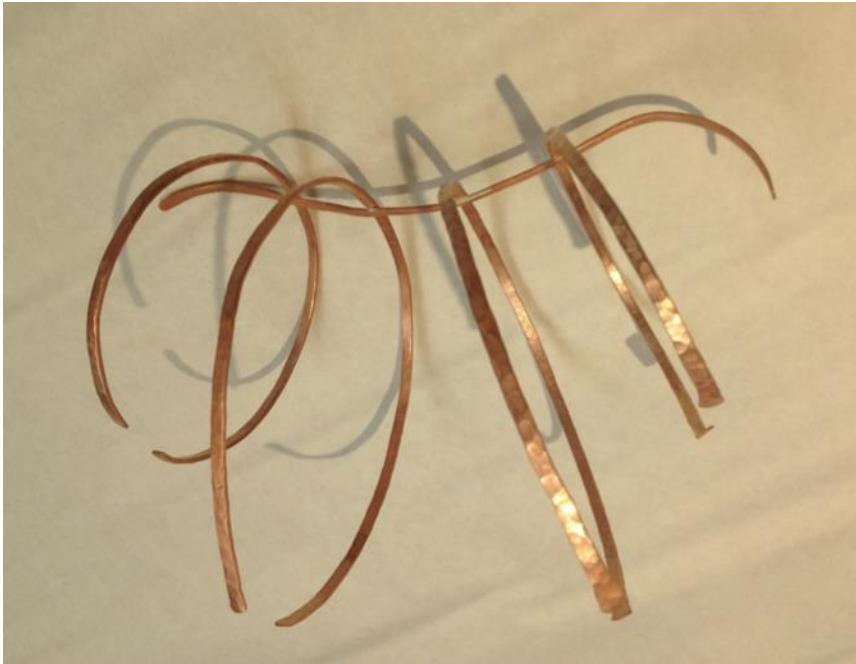
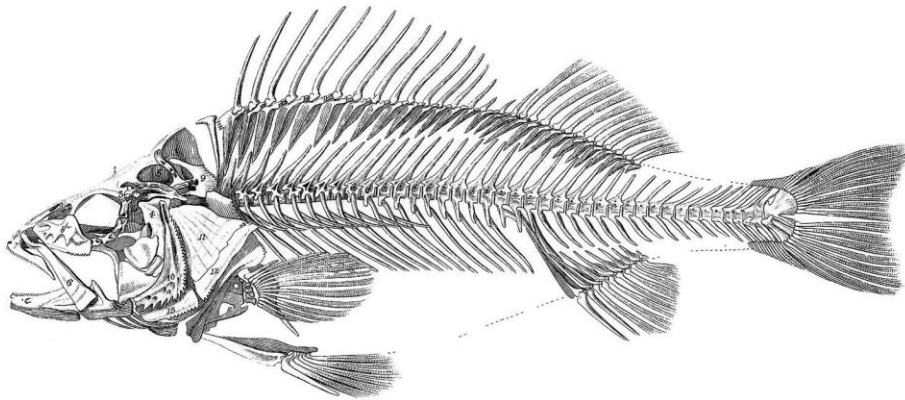


Figure 11. Mind map of the ocean, Fogarty, 2016.

Figure 12 shows the first shape that I made out of copper. While I was making the form, it began to take the shape of an animal or fish skeleton (see Figure 13). It served as a model for the additional nine skeletons. I developed my metalsmithing and fiber-making skills between the summer of 2016 and the summer of 2017.



*Figure 12.* First skeleton completed, Fogarty, 2016



*Figure 13.* Reference for skeleton forms, Watson, n.d. From *Instant Art Printable Download—Fish Skeleton* (p. 1), by K. Watson (n.d.). <https://thegraphicsfairy.com/instant-art-printable-download-fish-skeleton/>

One of my primary artistic influences was Ann Hamilton. I closely studied Anne Hamilton's piece, *The Event of a Thread*, for its multi-disciplinary, interactive,

and sensual qualities (see Figure 14). Much like her piece, I wanted to create an environment where people could have a place to rest and reflect.



*Figure 14.* Ann Hamilton: *The Event of a Thread*, Ewing, 2012. From *Ann Hamilton: The Event of a Thread* (p. 1), by J. Ewing, 2012. Ann [http://www.armoryonpark.org/programs\\_events/detail/ann\\_hamilton](http://www.armoryonpark.org/programs_events/detail/ann_hamilton)

The following definitions are used throughout this thesis:

**Annealing.** Annealing is heating the metal with an acetylene ( $C_2H_2$ ) gas torch to prepare it for forging and shaping.

**Cold forging.** Cold forging is the process of shaping metal after it has been heated at a high temperature with a torch. In this case, I used a sheet of copper and cooled the heated metal in water before I hammered it with a special forging hammer.

**Ecology.** The word ecology is from the Greek origin of oikos, which means house.

The suffix “logy” was added to the end to create the English word oecology,

and in the 19th century it was changed to ecology. Ecology is a branch of biology that studies the environment (homes) and the relationships between various organisms and the environments they are in. It has also become a political movement which aspires to protect the environment.

**Patina.** Patina is a film on the surface of metal, which is created with chemicals or heat from the acetylene torch. A patina can be a range of colors. I created what is called a rainbow patina by carefully heating the metal with the torch (Patina, n.d.).



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

My research for this project branched in four main directions:

- A/r/tography, arts-based inquiry and research.
- Sacred and historical aspects of water as an element.
- Environmental concerns.
- Exploration of artistic influences, which include artists who have worked with the subject of water.

This project focused on the inquiry that happens when one investigates the self through the process of art-making. It is not solely focused on the self, but rather the parts that connect us to the world we live in. The act of making art is research of its own. It is how we learn, discover, and sometimes stumble through the world. “Arts-based educational research is founded on the belief that the arts have the ability to contribute particular insights into and enhance understandings of phenomena that are of interest to educational researchers” (O’Donoghue, 2009, p. 352). In this way, we can understand what happens to an artist while in the process of art-making and the methods for inquiry into mediums, concepts, and emotions. Artists, art theorists, art educators, and intellectuals can begin to understand and collaborate with one another. Documentation of these inquiries and connections can help to answer questions such as, how can a piece of research include poetry or sculpture and still be substantive and useful to academic and lay audiences in education? Learning and research happen

when we explore, experience, and interact with a medium, whether that be through making a painting, making a sculpture, or reading a book.

The process of being an a/r/tographer or artist, researcher, and teacher all at once allow for making of work, reflection on the self, connection to the subject, and connection to the students. With the essence of the true purpose of doing any sort of research, no matter what kind of research, one is doing, arts-based research gives the artist, teacher, and researcher a holistic view of a subject.

A/r/tography is a form of practice-based research steeped in the arts and education. Alongside other arts-based, arts-informed and aesthetically defined methodologies, a/r/tography is one of many emerging forms of inquiry that refer to the arts as a way re-searching the world to enhance understanding. Yet, it goes even further by recognizing the educative potential of teaching and learning as acts of inquiry. (Irwin et al., 2006, p. 70)

These personal inquiries often relate in a rhizomatic pattern which is non-linear and often comes to no final conclusion, but rather an exploration of a process. The roles of artist, researcher, and teacher are equally important in this endeavor.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe rhizomes metaphorically through the image of crabgrass that connects any point to any other point by growing in all directions. Through this image they stress the importance of the middle by disrupting the linearity of beginnings and endings. (Irwin et al., 2006, p. 71)

When I was working through themes and concepts with this project, I would create mind maps, or graphic organizers, to help me to organize my ideas. My vision for this project was for the work to continue to evolve. There is no endpoint, but rather a continuation of a fascination. Through the process of making, I made new discoveries, which I could not have anticipated. Though the goal at the University Northern Colorado was to create an installation, the work will continue to evolve in the studio and classroom.

Julia Marshall and Kimberley D'Adamo connected artistic inquiry to the contemporary art classroom which contrasts with conventional ways of teaching art.

First, it stresses artistic thinking, creative process, conceptual skills, and research over technical artmaking skills. Second, student's artwork is seen differently; it is considered a springboard for learning and evidence of learning, not aesthetic objects or images separate from research. Third, art practice is self-guided and motivated by student interest; the teacher sets the stage and acts as a guide and provocateur. (Marshall & D'Adamo, 2011, p. 12)

As I embarked on my new career as a kindergarten-12 art educator, I was striving to create this same environment and culture of inquiry, discovery, creativity, and learning. This creative project allowed me a further depth of understanding of this sort of inquiry. "To live the life of an artist who is also a researcher and teacher is to live a life of awareness, a life that permits openness to the complexity around us" (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004, p. 33).

The relationship between the natural world and the sacred, or divine, has been in existence throughout history. As I began to research my topic, memories began to flood my consciousness. As children, we were baptized in holy water. Later in life, when we entered the church, we dipped our fingers in a small basin of holy water and made the sign of the cross. I remember the peace that I felt as I crossed that threshold into the dark, incensed space of the church. The cool sanctuary was punctuated by colored light from the stained-glass windows. When I was older, I went through a confirmation ceremony where our feet were washed as a sign of purification.

In Islam, ritual purity, or Al-Taharah, is a significant predecessor to prayer, so devotees must wash their bodies before entering the temple. "Both the Ghusl (bath) and the Wudu (ablution) are required preliminaries to prayer (Salat)" (Ogungbile, 1997, p. 23). I referenced purification rituals in my exhibition with a small altar at the

entrance. On the altar was a copper bowl that was filled with water. Suspended above the bowl was a small figure of shaped copper. Water is meant to purify. It is the source of all life, and where life begins. Water is seen through a sacred lens across varying continents and cultures. I have always been fascinated with the study of spiritual practices in different cultures. Many years ago, I practiced Tibetan Buddhism and was devoted to that practice for years. One of our rituals was to place several copper bowls filled with water on an altar as an offering. It was meant to be an offering to the five Buddha families, which represented water, earth, fire, wind, and space.

Ogungbile (1997) focused on water symbolism as it has been practiced in Afro-Christian churches, “This indigenization process resulting from the integration of certain symbolic elements from the African sacred cosmos with central tenets of the Bible has also given birth to African Theology or African Christian Theology” (p. 21).

To Africans generally, water transcends its scientific properties or chemical composition (H<sub>2</sub>O) as testable in the chemistry laboratory. The sacred quality of water has diverse symbolic meanings and applications in Yoruba religious traditions, and these characteristics have been adapted by the Afro-Christian movement. (Ogungbile, 1997, p. 21)

The image of water across these traditions takes on many different figures. In most mythical narrative, water is presenting the world from the most ancient times, that is, at the time of origins. I have often reflected on the qualities of different bodies of water and how they may appeal to the senses. Most often, people gravitate to waters that are accessible to where they live. I spent many hours on the Rhode Island coastline at a place called Hazard Rocks in Narragansett. The coastline was jagged and rocky, and the waves and wind would pound on the rocks sending sea mist into the air. This place would remind me that life is fleeting and sometimes unsteady, but the rocks

stand firmly. If they could survive the constant pounding of the surf, so could I. Nature has always been my healing guide.

In some churches in Africa, different forms of water are prescribed, depending on the nature of the sickness that a person might have. I have included some general descriptions.

- There is the water that falls from the sky or atmosphere, such as rain and dew.
- Running water includes rivers and streams, which can aid in wiping away evil spirits and restoring life. Rivers can signify peace, purity, and freshness.
- Stagnant waters include seas, oceans, lakes, ponds, and pools. They are often said to be peaceful or tranquil (Ogungbile, 1997).

Pollution is certainly a concern for the world's waterways, but consumption is another pressing matter. Who has rights to water sources, and how is that decided? What is the history of water in our country and beyond? There were many questions that emerged during the course of this study. I did not seek answers to all of my questions, but I did seek out a deeper understanding. Engineering and technology have allowed us to manipulate the course of water and utilize its power for our energy, agriculture, and many other human needs. We also use a tremendous amount of water for fracking. This is an issue which is quite a concern for our local community in Weld County.

Sandford and Phare (2011) discussed several principles, which progress towards a more ethical treatment of water. They begin with recognition for nature's need for water. Often, the focus is on humans' need for water; but in order to achieve

more balance in water ecology, there needs to be a more equitable mindset and practices that favor both nature and humans alike. A mindset was adapted in the 1930s upon the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam in Washington State, which forever changed the course of waterways throughout the United States and the whole world. The building of these dams was part of a bigger trend of colonization of people and diversion of water to accommodate new settlements. Developers altered the flow of thousands of rivers, but displaced thousands of people and animals who depended on those bodies of water. “The motto was to the effect that every drop of water that ran to the sea without yielding its full commercial return to the nation was an economic waste” (Sandford & Phare, 2011, p. 50). In modern times, this notion has been dispelled in many regions of the world. “We now know that engineering-based models of hydrological cycles did not take into account the actual behavior of complex ecological systems” (Sandford & Phare, 2011, p. 51). There needs to be more and stronger partnerships between regions of water abundance and regions of water scarcity.

Sandford and Phare (2011) defined the difference between blue water and green water. Blue water is what appears on the surface of the earth in lakes, rivers, and oceans, while green water comes in the form of precipitation, which is then absorbed by the soil. Water plays a vital role in maintaining the resilience of our ecosystems. Although there are many restoration projects underfoot, the question is, Can the rate of restoration keep up with the rate of destruction? This was a question I pondered as I combed through the data. Is nature going to be able to keep up with our demands for water and energy? Can our waterways sustain the continued dumping of harmful substances?

Water is linked to human health, and the lack of adequate consumer protection against toxic substances is quite alarming. Plastics and other toxins are making their way into our food sources, even though chemicals such as Bisphenol A have been removed from many forms of plastics. Our dependence on plastics and the prevalence of our single-use plastics are clogging our waterways, breaking down into smaller pieces, where they are consumed and absorbed by the plants and animals that humans consume.

Many of these toxins can disrupt the endocrine system in humans, which can interfere with hormone production in the body.

Endocrine disruptors are substances that mimic or interfere with the function of hormones in the body. They may turn on, shut off, or modify signals that hormones carry and thus affect the normal functioning of tissues and organs. Endocrine signals govern virtually every organ and process in the body. (Sandford & Phare, 2011, p. 73)

Artists respond to environmental issues through art-making, sometimes in site-specific locations within the environment they are concerned with. Barbara C. Matilsky offered a unique survey of contemporary artists' explorations of various ecologies. Ecological art addresses issues that threaten the vitality of a diverse range of ecologies, from wetlands to oceans to forests. "The word [Ecology] derives from the Greek words *oikos*, which means 'house' or 'habitat', and *logos*, which translates as 'doctrine'" (Matilsky, 1992, p. 3).

In the late 1970s, the artist Betty Beaumont created an underwater sculpture reef which directly addressed environmental concerns of the ocean. The Ocean Landmark Project was in response to the worst oil spill in United States history in 1969, when an oil tanker capsized off the coast of Santa Barbara, California. The underwater sculpture off the coast of New York City is a reef that consists of 17,000

blocks composed of 500 tons of recycled coal ash. The open spaces within the arrangement of bricks allowed for certain species of fish to form habitats. The project was a collaboration between Beaumont and scuba divers, biologists, chemists, oceanographers, and engineers. It is a magnificent example of environmental art which utilizes recycled materials to help benefit the environment. Although a model was displayed for the public to learn about the project, the true art is under the sea. Since the artist was an experienced diver, she was able to document the work as marine life came to live within the bricks (Matilsky, 1992).

My inquiry led me to another artist who created an organization called Washed Ashore. The non-profit, community-based organization was founded in 2010 by Angela Haseltine Pozzi. Together with an arsenal of volunteers, the Oregon-based organization has helped to clean up several tons of plastic waste from the Oregon coastline and beyond and created over 60 large public sculptures of marine animals which are affected by the consumption of plastic waste (see Figures 15 and 16). Upon discovering this organization two years ago, I brought my family to see the sculptures on display at the Denver Zoo. Next to each display, there was information about how many plastic pieces it took to create each piece, and an interactive “can you find it” challenge which was very engaging. The displays served to educate the public about plastic waste in the ocean by creating interactive sculptures that are bright and colorful, but also spark up conversations with children and adults who see them.





*Figure 15.* Washed Ashore Exhibition 1, 2016-2018. From *Washed Ashore*, by Artula Institute for Arts and Environmental Education, 2016-2018. <http://washedashore.org/>



*Figure 16.* Washed Ashore Exhibition 2, 2016-2018. From *Washed Ashore*, by Artula Institute for Arts and Environmental Education, 2016-2018. <http://washedashore.org/>

Alejandro Durán is another artist who promotes awareness of plastic waste in the ocean. His project is called *Washed Up*, and they are focused along Mexico's Caribbean coastline. He creates striking installations and photographs and has worked with coastal communities and youth to help clean up the coastline (see Figures 17 and 18).

All of the great artists and writers I have mentioned influenced my thoughts and inspired me while making this body of work. It was empowering to affirm how the arts can create awareness and change around environmental concerns.



*Figure 17. Brotos (Shoots), Durán, 2014. From *Washed Up: Transforming a Trashed Landscape* (Washed Up series), by Alejandro Durán, 2018. <http://www.alejandroduran.com/>*



*Figure 18. Alejandro Durán working, 2018. From *Washed Up: Transforming a Trashed Landscape* (p. 1), by Alejandro Durán, 2018.*  
<http://www.alejandroduran.com/>

### CHAPTER III

#### RESEARCH STRATEGIES, METHODS, AND PROCESURES

I began my research process in June 2016 when I took the ART 600 Research Methods in Art class, which helped me begin to formulate my research question(s). That summer, I also took a fibers class, which allowed me to begin exploring with new media. This class led me to begin working with felt. It was also during this class that I chose the Oak Room in Crabbe Hall, University of Northern Colorado, as the site for an installation. The space was dark and warm, which seemed to be a perfect fit for the work I wanted to create. So much of my research evolved through the process of making the work itself and then reflecting on what I was making. Much of the process evolved while I was beginning the research for this project. As much as possible, I tried to immerse myself in the subject of water, especially because I was trying to create a space that was meant to be immersive. If I was not in the studio or reading, I watched countless hours of documentaries about water, environmental concerns, and marine life.

I was also completing my coursework for my kindergarten-12 teacher licensure. This naturally led me to think of ways that I could bring the subject into the classroom setting and how art-making could be used to integrate with other subjects. The nature of this project was for my own personal investigation, rather than a study within my classroom, but the research will have future implications for me as an art educator (see Appendix for a water unit sketch). This project afforded me the

opportunity to study my own rhizomatic creative process in depth. The insights I have gained will help me guide students through the practice of creating work and making meaning from what they create. The data for this study were collected equally between literary research time and studio experiences. This time period was over a three-year span.

While completing this thesis, I was limited in the amount of time, space, and energy that I could devote to writing. I was completing a post-baccalaureate licensure program that included a semester of student teaching. While I was student teaching, I strengthened my metalsmithing skills as I was teaching high school students how to fabricate pieces out of metal. I used the pieces I fabricated as examples for what the students could create. These are the beautiful intersections that co-exist as an artist/teacher in the classroom studio environment. There are times when the teacher humbly steps aside and learns from the student. Sometimes one is all three roles at once or different roles at different times, depending on the interaction with the students. I felt it was important for the students to see that I was learning along with them and that I was an artist as well. The only way to learn from the interactions was by doing. In demonstrating a process for my students, I felt it was important for them to be aware of all of my failures that led to eventual success.

Another limitation to collecting data was that the space where *Vitality of Water/Vitalidad del Agua* was installed was only available during limited gallery hours. I was not able to see how participants interacted with the work as much as I wanted to. I installed the work with the help of my family, and it was exhibited during the Center for Integrated Arts Education, which was a three-day conference of art educators held at the University of Northern Colorado. Because the conference took

place in June, I did not have full access to university staff and faculty. I had two opening receptions where I gave a talk about the work I completed. Viewers were invited to walk into the space and interact with the work, either by lying on the floor or walking through the video projection, felted forms, and metal forms. They were surrounded with the cool metal skeletons and felted seaweed, so that it would feel like they were underwater (see Figure 19).



*Figure 19.* Felted forms with video projection, Fogarty, 2017.

Soothing water sounds undulated between the blue light of a streaming video of underwater life, especially of manta rays swimming. Given that this project took so

much time to evolve, I felt that I had adequate time to marinate, ponder, and explore the subject, but the gallery space did not offer participants enough time to sit with the work. I wanted to create a feeling of movement in the space, so I used a fan.

Ultimately, the sounds of the fan competed too much with the sound of the video, and the space was so warm that it was uncomfortable for viewers to be in the space for very long. In the future, I would like to seek out a space that might affect the work more positively.

The data I collected came through making art, dreaming, recording, watching documentaries, and literary research. Figures 20, 21, 22, and 23 include in-progress documentation of this arts-based research here. Figure 20 shows the wires after I cut them to the correct size. The wire was six-gauge copper wire that is normally used for construction. Each section of wire had to be annealed (heated with a torch) so that the metal would be soft enough to hammer. After I hammered and filed each piece, I set the pieces up to be soldered (see Figure 21). After all of the soldering was complete, I shaped the forms, cleaned them, and used the torch to apply a heat patina (see Figure 22). There was an overhead light in the studio that allowed me to play with the completed forms to see what kind of shadows they could create (see Figure 23).

Figure 24 shows a bowl that I forged out of a solid sheet of copper. It was forged with a hammer out of a hand-cut circular piece of copper sheet. When the metal became work-hardened, I annealed it again and continued hammering. The finish is a heat patina or rainbow patina. This was created by using the torch and carefully heating the metal until the color changes. The bowl was placed on a small altar filled with water at the entrance of the room. There was a skeleton hanging just above it.





*Figure 20.* Wire before annealing or hammering, Fogarty, 2017.



*Figure 21.* Hammered wire ready to be soldered, Fogarty, 2017.



*Figure 22.* Finished skeleton after application of a heat patina, Fogarty, 2017.



*Figure 23.* Playing with light and shadow, Fogarty, 2017.



*Figure 24.* Hand-raised copper bowl, Fogarty, 2017.

The process of felting is very similar to painting. The wool is drafted, or pulled from a bigger bundle, and placed wherever it is needed (see Figure 25). Several layers are placed on top of each other in alternating directions. I used bubble wrap to help agitate and capture the hot soapy water. The bubble wrap can be re-used indefinitely. There is a layer of bubble wrap on the top and bottom of the felt. Hot soapy water is added, and I used a bundled plastic bag to agitate the layers (see Figure 26). This was the most time consuming and physical part of the process. I enlisted the help of family and friends to help me create all of the felt pieces (see Figure 27).



*Figure 25.* Placing the roving (hand-dyed merino wool), Fogarty, 2017.



*Figure 26.* Agitating the fibers, Fogarty, 2017.



*Figure 27.* I taught several people how to felt, Fogarty, 2017.

Figure 28 shows how the felt looks after it has been agitated. The hot, soapy water allowed the fibers of the wool to open. The agitation by hand allowed the open fibers to mesh with one another. Then, I carefully lifted the piece up and rinsed it several times in cold water. The cold water allowed the fibers to set. This piece started to take on the subtle form of a manta ray. There were inconsistencies in the finished forms, because it was important to allow light to penetrate through the fiber. I also felt it gave some of the forms a feeling of decay.



*Figure 28.* Piece ready to be rinsed and laid to dry, Fogarty, 2017.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

One of the biggest challenges of making this body of work was that it was site-specific. As I was completing the felt and metal pieces, I began to hang them up in my basement, so I could see how they interacted with each other and the light source. Fortunately, I was familiar with the Oak Room space after I installed the prototype in 2016. Figures 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34 were taken during the installation of the show.



*Figure 29.* Displayed felt and copper piece in my basement, Fogarty, 2016.



*Figure 30.* Vicky taking on the challenge of making the manta rays, Fogarty, 2017.



*Figure 31.* During the installation in the Oak Room, Fogarty, 2017.



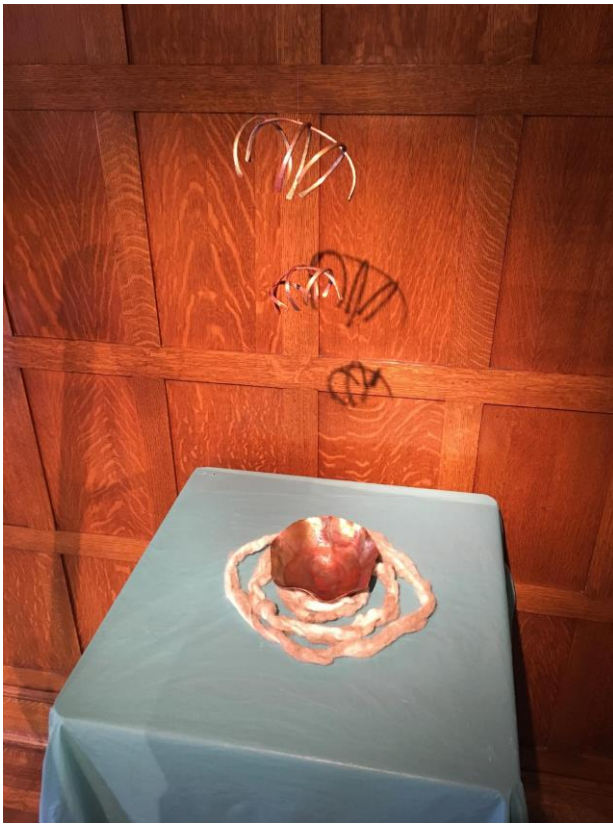


*Figure 32. Manta Ray with light, Fogarty, 2017.*

Through the process of my research, I became fascinated with manta rays and decided to make the forms of manta rays floating across the canopy, rather than a solid canopy that I made in the prototype (see Figures 30, 31, and 32). In the end, I was not able to create the look of the magical canopy that I was hoping for, but it was close. I preferred the look of the first canopy, but at that point we had not yet made the manta ray forms.



*Figure 33. Piecing together the altar 1, Fogarty, 2017.*



*Figure 34. Piecing together the altar 2, Fogarty, 2017*

My primary questions of inquiry were:

- Q1 How has art-making engaged addressed the subject of water ecology throughout the years?
- Q2 How can I visually describe the feeling of safety, beauty, fluidity, and decay?

The artists I have referenced were successful in creating spaces of inquiry. All of them have used the environment at one point or another, but all of the pieces I have referenced do not all directly address the environment. I have highlighted two organizations, Washed Ashore and Washed Up, who work directly with the environment and art-making to raise awareness and facilitate change.

Figures 35, 36, and 37 show the installation when it was complete. The photographs were taken at the reception.



*Figure 35.* Installation with video projection 1, Fogarty, 2017.



*Figure 36.* Installation with video projection 2, Fogarty, 2017.



*Figure 37.* Installation with video projection 3, Fogarty, 2017.

Why was it important to me to create a safe and womb-like space? This is where my art-making and my other passion for the healing arts intersect. I have been a massage therapist, bodyworker, and healing practitioner for the past 18 years of my life. So much of my time and energy has been focused on learning and practicing

healing therapies for people in pain, whether emotionally, spiritually, or physically. When someone comes to you in a vulnerable state needing help, all measures must be taken to make sure that they can feel safe, open, and vulnerable. Sometimes people experience intense physical pain and suffering caused by trauma, and as a practitioner I help to create a safe space for them to heal. The womb is our original space of safety, darkness, and nurturing. The space I work within has often been dark, quiet, and warm. Aside from having a connection with a massage practitioner, the client must feel welcome and warm. I wanted the installation space of Vitality of Water/Vitalidad del Agua to feel like a healing sanctuary. When one goes to a safe place such as this, intense memories and emotions may arise. When you make space for yourself, you have room to grow and heal old wounds. This is a bold act within itself and requires a great degree of trust and surrender. I feel that I was mostly successful in creating a calm space of safety and tranquility. I created a space which felt like a place. A place is where one can feel connected with themselves and others. A place is where we feel we belong. Though I do not know if the viewers of the work felt that connection, when I was alone with both the beginning prototype, and the final piece, I felt a deep sense of peace and accomplishment. I felt a sense of belonging to the work, and the work belonging to me. It was a place of deep surrender and fulfillment. There is something magical that can happen when we lay on the earth and feel a sense of belonging and safety in a place. That is what I felt. The textures of the work as a whole, created what I wanted. I feel that the sensation of being under a water canopy in the ocean was a bit stronger in the prototype, but the felted and metal pieces added natural feeling elements that the tool could not. The manta rays evolved as I watched countless hours of video footage of rays swimming in the water. I even took my son to the aquarium

so that we could see and touch the rays. To me, they were the most beautiful, majestic, and mysterious creatures I have experienced. Their movements in the water were so elegant and graceful. When I feel at peace, I float through life in the same way that a ray does.

CHAPTER V  
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS,  
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I began this body of work with the desire to create an installation which intersected with ecology and science and advocated for passionate and direct ways to create change in the environment. I envisioned that the work would include upcycled plastic materials in innovative ways. As I worked my way through the materials and research, I also began an exploration of forms of media, which I previously had no experience with: fibers and metal. These mediums allowed me to discover new ways of expressing my chosen topic. Through rhizomatic and heuristic explorations, the work began to reflect deeper parts of myself and my journey in life. The work became a metaphor for the way I have lived my life and the choices I have made, which have brought me to where I am. “I reflect, and I attempt to map out my journey as an artist, teacher, and researcher. Sometimes I feel as though I am going around and around in cycles, overlapping, revisiting, coming back to the same questions” (Naths, 2004, p. 121).

Although I was able to collaborate with other people for this project, it would be wonderful to continue this work with other artists who have worked with similar themes. I would seek out and utilize a different installation space. My questions were always evolving as I was immersed in this work. Sometimes the questions overlapped, sometimes the questions were answered, and sometimes the questions were left unanswered because they were no longer important.



“Look deeper, I counsel self. Follow your bliss and if there is something there, it will surface.” (Naths, 2004, p. 121). By allowing the time and space to complete this body of work, it allowed the spaciousness of reflection on what this work has truly meant to me at this point in my life. I am an artist, wife, mother, teacher, and healer. The physical, emotional, and spiritual rigor of this work will now be a part of my story for the rest of my days, and what I have gained has become a part of who I am.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have completed *Vitality of Water/Vitalidad del Agua* and have the time and space to reflect and digest all that I have learned in the process. I hope that my collaborators and colleagues have also gained something meaningful in this process. I look forward to the next chapter of my life and what new experiences await me in the classroom and studio.

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**APPENDIX**  
**WATER UNIT**

## WATER UNIT

I would like to continue exploring themes of ecology and environmental change within the classroom setting. Following is a unit sketch, which includes many possible questions of inquiry for students.

### **Water Unit (3 classes)**

**Objective:** Students will respond to the subject of water through art-based response.

**Activity:** At the beginning of each class, show a documentary about water, or an artist that has focused on water, then reflect, write and plan for arts-based response.

Think Pair Share about the issues of water ecology, conservation and pollution in the water ways, using inquiry questions.

#### **Inquiry questions:**

- How can we change our current practices of consumption of plastic materials?
- How can we conserve the water that we use and protect the environment?
- Have you ever visited the ocean, or maybe a lake or river in Colorado? What did you see, feel or notice about the water?
- What about fracking? What is water used for here? When there is wastewater from fracking, where does it go?
- What do we use water for everyday? What are your everyday habits, and could you change them to help save water?
- How does your family view water? Ask them. What memories of water do they have? What memories do you have?
- How do you feel when you are near a lake or river?
- How do you feel when you see pictures of water that is full of plastic pieces?

- How do you think it got there? What are the risks of it being there? Can you imagine a time when it is not there?
- Have you ever been to a place where you see there is less water than there used to be, like a dried-up river or lake?
- How does your family use water? Do they do things to conserve water?
- How would you feel if you did not have access to clean water whenever you wanted?
- Have you ever been to a place where they seemed to have more or less water than we do in Colorado?
- How do you feel when you see pictures or videos underwater?
- What do you like about water? What would you do if you didn't have enough water?

Using the model of a choice-based curriculum, students can respond to the topic like a prompt and go through all of the necessary steps.

1. Identify or discover what the topic will be.
2. What is the initial response without research or gut feeling about something or write a response based on the senses.
3. How do the students respond to pictures, video, or initial discussions of the topic? What are the discussions that evolve?

What can I expect from each grade level, knowing what I know about each age/grade level?