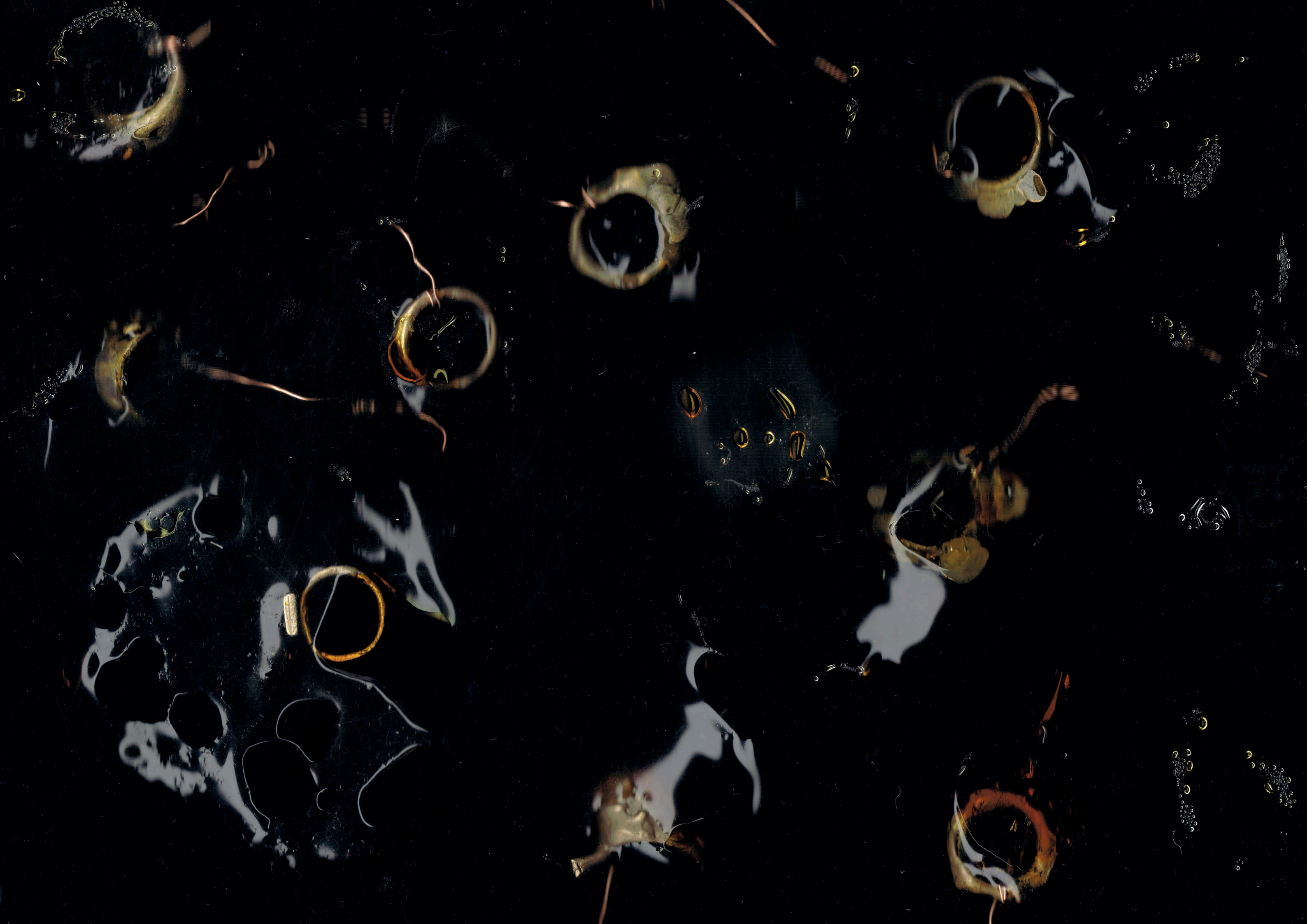


Sticky Correspondence: An animist design encounter

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Abstract

Through conversations with materials, we can open the imaginary to an interconnected world where the boundary between object and subject becomes obscured, and the animated qualities of materials reveal themselves. How does adopting a neo-animistic worldview enrich our experience of interconnectedness and material agency? This research endeavours within the sticky cosmos of the Greek Orthodox Wedding Ceremony, where the wedding ring's material animacy performs and subject/object relations manifest. Materials' elemental narratives materialise through ritualised making and the design of sensory spatial encounters (devised in ritualised installations and spatialised artefacts). Attentive material understandings (immersive and sensory conversations with sugar, wax and metal) are conceived by listening to the whispers of materials. Attending to material vibrations unearths a sensory crescendo which has allowed me to begin understanding the sticky interrelatedness of all things.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lyle Ford". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "L".

15 / 08 / 2022

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Fig. 2 Downard, Taylor. *My Bunica's Wedding Ring*, photocopier image, 2021.

With a neo-animistic understanding of materials used in matrimonial jewellery, how can the design of ceremonial objects create sensory encounters that connect the object/entity with the subjects, changing their perception of the world?



Prelude: *The Ring and the Incantation*

The woman untethering the wedding band from her finger, tentatively passed it over the counter to me for mending. *“When I take off my ring”, she uttered, “I feel naked.”*

Her words, like an incantation, transformed my understanding, propelling my material world with a poetic motion toward this research. On removing the ring, her skin retained its ghostly echo, an etching of the ritual act of joining two bodies into one. The agency of the ring altering her substance, an alchemical transformation evidenced physically and metaphorically.

Animism from Latin - anima: breath, spirit, life

I regard myself as a neo-animist designer, asserting materials communicate in an elemental and sensory language. Within this research, caramelised sugar is an alchemical symbol, a ritually saturated entity and an embodiment and agent of the binding and transformational properties of the wedding ring. Catalysed through liquidation, dissolving my material perceptions, its fluidity has become a method for communicating and reimagining the animacy and power of materials.

Like the ring, her words were sticky, leaving an intoxicating residue that consumed my imaginary.

1. In 2020 when I worked at The Village Goldsmith, a customer came to the shop who wished to have her wedding ring fixed because it was worn and broken. The customer commented that without her wedding ring, she felt naked. While seemingly inconsequential remarks pass between customers and shop workers all day as polite conversation, this small confession endured beyond the moment. The woman, now a figment of my imagination, has become emblematic.



Fig. 4 Downard, Taylor. *Plastered Ring Tree One*, plaster and wax, 2022.

Introduction

Through this material enquiry, I seek to reveal how material's animate qualities can come to possess makers and subjects. This exegesis is composed of three parts and begins with the methodology section because it joins my material and contextual practices. Part One unravels stickiness as a methodology and what stickiness means within a neo-animist worldview—its magical form. I discuss the neo-animistic approach used by extracting three stages of stickiness – raw, flux and solidify. Each method converses and engages with the material's elemental narratives. In Part Two, I discuss the contexts situating this research, beginning with the entangling rituals of Greek Orthodox marriage and my making practice. Following this, I open a dialogue with animate materials, material imaginaries and my installation practice. Through these contexts, I will discuss how the practices of Christian Boltanski, Cornelia Parker, Karl Fritsch and Kara Walker use a material agency to ignite and bind social relations. Finally, in Part Three, I contemplate the processes of making, including a discussion regarding neo-animist material conversations and the outcomes of this approach. Recognising neo-animism as a worldview that reconnects me to my past and ancient beliefs, I evaluate how it has impacted the outcome of this research and my design practice.

Anima: Breath, Spirit, Life

Spellbound by the woman's remark, I wondered how the ring's materiality could embody such a vital force.

This question catalysed this enquiry, sparking a personal journey to understand how an animist worldview would change my approach to design. Transdisciplinary theorist Betti Marenko describes neo-animism (new animism), as “Traces of animism—the idea that objects and other nonhuman entities possess a soul, life force, and qualities of personhood...”² that remain in our lives. Through a neo-animist design ethos, I have reconnected with the ideologies of my Ancient Greek ancestors, who believed in the animating power of breath, spirit and life and that inanimate objects possessed these. It has also provided a belief system for understanding the deep cultural symbolism surrounding Greek Orthodox marriage, anchoring this project.

As a 21st-century neo-animist designer, my practice now revolves around using ritual processes to speak through, and with, materials. For example, I conceive heat as an elemental process. Heat arouses the animate materiality and transformative powers of sugar, wax and metal. I have observed seemingly inert matter come to life, alchemically mutating, performing material poetics. I describe this state as

2. Betti Marenko, “Neo-Animism: A New Paradigm in Object Theory,” *Design and Culture* 6, 2 (2014): 219, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264711716_Neo-Animism_and_Design_A_New_Paradigm_in_Object_Theory.



stickiness because it animates the spatialised object and its terrain. Stickiness refers to the realm of fluidic viscosity, the syrupy revolving cosmos where material bodies relate, absorbing dimensions of each other. Anthropologist Tim Ingold describes this process of making as a joining of forces between maker and material.³ My making is a manifestation of the imaginary and draws on the resistance of materials (materials' refusal to conform to me) to perform their elemental narratives. It is this tension and give between material and maker that motivates my making.⁴ This methodological approach enables me to engage in intimate conversations with the material world (as part of my design ethos). Drawing on a broad range of disciplines, my spatial design spans installation, jewellery design, sugar-work, and moving image. I collaborate with materials to combine the intimate with the public and bind subjects and objects.

3. Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London; New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 21.

4. Sue Gallagher, "Home-body: A spatial inquiry into queer material imagination" (Doctoral Theses, Auckland University of Technology, 2020), 84, <https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/handle/10292/13755>.

Fig. 5 Downard, Taylor. *Worldly Sugar*, caramelised sugar, bronze rings and candle wick, 2021.



Fig. 6 Downard, Taylor. *Worldly Sugar Two*, caramelised sugar, bronze and candle wick, 2021.



Fig. 7 Downard, Taylor. *Worldly Sugar Three*, caramelised sugar, bronze and candle wick, 2021.

Part One: Stickiness, a Neo-Animist Design Methodology

An Animists Worldview

As a design philosophy, neo-animism allows me to understand the agency and relatedness of material bodies (animate and inanimate). A neo-animist worldview questions Western material understanding by proposing there is a bodily affinity (shared, agentic matter) within all materials. Through making rituals and intimate conversations, sugar revealed its animate knowledge to me. It prompted me to look beyond the surface and consider how agency plays an active role in a material's behaviour.

Neo-animism uncouples the concept of animism from English anthropologist Edward Tylor's (1871) pejorative term. Tylor's animism is an anthropological theory used to explain indigenous beliefs, magic, and rituals.⁵ Tylor defined animism as a primitive indigenous concept that attributes life to inanimate things.⁶ For me, it is a reclaiming indigenous Greek idea from a 19th-century way of thinking about alterity. Neo-animism allows me to reimagine and redefine animism in our contemporary context as a sublime way of knowing and relating with materials. Within my practice, animism provokes an instinctual and intuitive way of thinking through and working with materials. Being a neo-animist designer has altered my perception of materiality, enabling me to consider ethically how I respond to materials and how they shape the making process.

Designed animism may help us make crucial changes in how we frame the world and how we behave in the face of enormous environmental challenges.
Brenda Laurel, 2009.

American video game designer and researcher Brenda Laurel is interested in the relationship between pervasive computing and animism. Laurel explains, "what's lovely to me about animism is not so much its philosophical or religious dimensions but the *behaviors* and *artifacts* that are created by people in response to animistic beliefs."⁷ Through material conversations, I have become responsive to their stories. Sugar's elemental narratives drove our conversations, speaking to me of material agency, equality and environmental ethics. Sugar provoked me to question the life cycle of matter and how the material could be reused or recycled. All the materials I have used; sugar, pinkysil, wax, investment and bronze, have been collected and reused as part of (the continuum of) my neo-animist practice and philosophy.

5. Lowie Robert, "Edward B. Tylor," *American Anthropologist* 19, 2 (1917): 262–263, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/660758>.

6. Edward B Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1924), 431.

7. Brenda Laurel, "Designed Animism," in *(Re)Searching the Digital Bauhaus*, ed. Thomas Binder, Jonas Löwgren and Lone Malmberg (London: Springer-Verlag, 2009), 252.



Fig. 8 Downard, Taylor. *Liquid State of Love*: sugar stains, bronze, caramelised sugar, 2021.

As a design ethos, neo-animism expands one's senses and encourages attentive relationships with the inanimate world. Australian Anthropologist Michael Taussig asserts this is the "magic of mimesis."⁸ Taussig explains mimesis has two layers, "a copying or imitation, and a palpable, sensuous, connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived."⁹

Political theorist Jane Bennett asserts animist knowledge is an "expanded notion of self-interest."¹⁰ Bennett explains how an augmented sense of self-interest reveals material animacy, or what she describes as material "vibrancy." "By 'vitality' I mean the capacity of things edibles, commodities, storms, metals- not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own."¹¹ Bennett's ideas encapsulate my understandings and intentions, illustrating the need for designers to listen to materials and to recognise that they have vitality which affects the world. British anthropologist Alfred Gell describes this notion of neo-animacy and "vibrancy"¹² as a form of magic or agency. Like Bennett, Gell outlines how artifacts/non-human materials occupy the networks of human social agency. Within this milieu, subjects and objects are parallel beings.¹³



Fig. 9

Positioning design as material conversations requires designers to engage in a sensory dialogue. Such exchanges re-establish the imaginary (a creative force often missing from Western cultural encounters). Neo-animism, as a design imaginary, fosters harmonic relationships with the material world. As a neo-animist designer, I engaged in elemental narratives that unveil sugar, wax and metal's interiority. Sugar's glutinous substance inspired my design decision-making through its uninhibited and alchemical behaviours. Partnering with caramelised sugar created material similitudes between metal, wax, and human bodies. For example, during my first installation, *The Liquid State of Love*, I crafted bronze rings and ornamented them with sugar gems. Over time the stones liquified, leaving syrupy, sticky traces upon the gallery's white walls. This experiment with the temporality of sugar became a central focus of the design imaginary informing this research.

8 . Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity : A Particular History of the Senses* (New York : Routledge, 1993), 79.

9 . Taussig, 79.

10. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter : A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), viii.

11. Bennett, viii.

12. Bennett, viii.

13. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), 153.

Fig. 9 Downard, Taylor. *Liquid State of Love*: ring one, bronze, caramelised sugar, 2021.



It spreads through likeness like magical thinking. The viscous is a bird trap, but also somewhere where we are prone to take flight into a myriad of different discrete worlds and objects, all in one way completely unrelated, yet in another all occupants of that one alluring aversion. To touch something sticky is to be sent out into an indeterminate network of other sticky things — dog's noses, the walls of caves, slugs, toothpaste, sugar syrup, sweaty palms. That is not to say that all these things are in anyway the same.

Freddie Mason,
2020.

Fig. 10 Downard, Taylor. *A Sticky Network*, caramelised sugar, bronze, 2022.



Stickiness as Design Practice

The viscous is a state half: way between solid and liquid. It is like a cross-section in a process of change... It is soft, yielding and compressible... Its stickiness is a trap, it clings like a leech; it attacks the boundary between myself and it. Long columns falling off my fingers suggest my own substance flowing into a pool of stickiness . . . to touch stickiness is to risk diluting myself into viscosity . . .

Jean Paul Sartre, 1943.

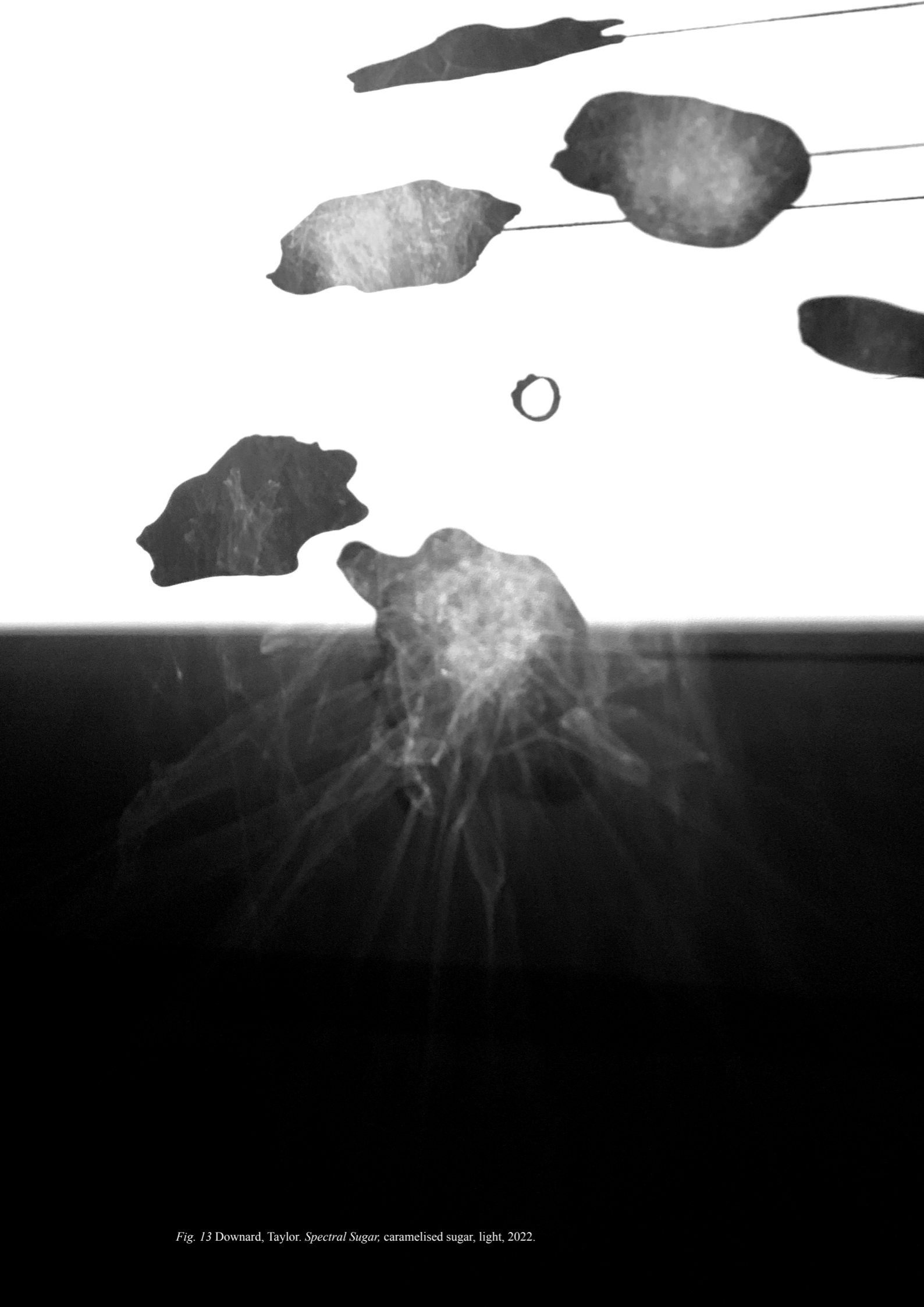
Sartre's description of the viscous state illustrates stickiness's active abilities. In this research, stickiness operates as a magical form. I perceive this magic to be a binding social force. When I sculpted rings with caramelised sugar, their stickiness encapsulated our parallelism. At that moment, we existed as a single collective substance. French philosopher Gaston Bachelard describes viscosity as "a moment of harmony, of deep satisfaction, an ideal coexistence."¹⁴ Bachelard's notion of harmony is also evident in my practice. Stickiness creates a bridge connecting sugar with other substances, such as the cast bronze rings. Designing with stickiness in mind ensures the material agency of each object adheres to the viewers' body, engendering an understanding of object/subject relatedness.

Embracing the liminality of stickiness, I sought to reveal the micro-world of sugar within the subject's macro-world—crafting moments of collision between the physical and ethereal. I used light to illuminate the spill of sugar's border zones adhering to the subjects' lifeworld, marrying them in a sticky conflux. The vital force of stickiness forms the core of this inquiry and the relationship that binds all. As a neo-animist methodology, stickiness denotes an imaginative engagement with the incorporeal—where physical encounters metaphorically adhere to material bodies and shape the social meshwork of our material world.

14. Freddie Mason, *The Viscous: Slime Stickiness Fondling Mixtures* (Brooklyn, New York: Punctum Books, 2020), 22.



Fig. 12 Downard, Taylor. *Fluidic Sugar*, caramelised sugar, bronze, 2022.



Methods

My methods emerged from stickiness. Sticky states demonstrate raw thinking, the ritual of flux (to materialise animacy), and the act of solidification (to fossilize the emergence of material agency). These methods provoked me into unpredictable material performances. Blakey Vermeule, a scholar in the theory of mind, suggests we motivate our animistic imaginaries through intimate experience and intuition.¹⁵ In this research, my designs manifest through active and attentive material interactions. Felt qualities and reciprocity drive this material interplay. Theorist Giuliana Bruno talks about French philosopher Bruno Latour's description of haptic engagement in her book *Pleats of Matter, Folds of the Soul*, suggesting "when we touch, we experience a full immersion and inversion, and reciprocity is a quality."¹⁶ Sticky methods have allowed me to design spatialised objects in a state of flux, giving physicality to the intangible pull between material bodies.

Raw

Raw methods enable my material imaginary to seep beyond the confines of Western perception, allowing the material world to break established rules and boundaries. Critical theorist Bill Brown proposes we could settle "the matter of things by starting again and imagining them [... as] things appear in the name of relief from ideas (what's encountered as opposed to what's thought)."¹⁷ Brown articulates how assuming a raw state of mind liberates us from concrete notions of materiality and ignites an intuitive and experiential approach to design. Using raw thinking, I endeavour to overthrow my preconceived ideas about the material world.

As a designer, raw methods have transformed how I interact and relate to nonhuman materials. Surface yearns for my haptic exchange, smells are an alluring invite, sound a materials calls, and taste is an engulfing and embodying experience. Gell and anthropologist Tim Ingold articulate that practitioners and spectators must become immersed in sensory dialect to know or follow materials. Gell suggests, "to see (or to know) is to be sensuously filled with that which is perceived, yielding to it, mirroring it and hence imitating it bodily."¹⁸ To see beyond the surface of sensory engagements, to understand its communicative powers, we must activate a raw and imaginative state of mind. At the same time, Ingold asserts, "To follow the materials, whether as practitioners or as observers (or both), we must clearly draw on all the senses we can. Depending on the circumstances, we need to watch, listen, touch, smell, and possibly taste as well."¹⁹ With raw material perceptions, I roam into crevices traversing uncharted territory.

15. Lars Bernaerts, Marco Caracciolo, Luc Herman and Bart Vervaek, "The Storied Lives of Non-Human Narrators," *Narrative* 22, 1 (2014): 69.

16. Giuliana Bruno, "Pleats of Matter, Folds of the Soul," *Log*, no. 1 (2003): 114, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41764958>.

17. Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, 1 (Autumn, 2001): 5, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1344258>.

18. Gell, *Art and Agency*, 100.

19. Tim Ingold, *Redrawing Anthropology: Materials, Movements, Lines* (Farnham: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011b), 21.



Flux

Ingold explains, “in place of the material world, populated by solid objects, our eyes are opened to a world of materials, including earth, air and water, in which all is in flux and transformation.”²⁰ Within a state of flux, spatial boundaries deteriorate. The threshold between subject and object wavers, liquidates and dissolves. Through neo-animism, I perceive the material world as constantly in flux. This method reveals material vitality. Engendering flux through heat evokes matter’s fluidity. Rigid exteriors loosen and liquefy, becoming relaxed, lively and social. Materials reveal their poetic selves, disclosing their potential to react and breathe. Similarly, artist Cornelia Parker’s installations are metaphors for breath.²¹ By engendering metamorphosis, Parker frees objects from dormancy. In comparison, I use lost wax casting in my jewellery practice to investigate the flux and animacy of materials.

20. Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: essays on movement, knowledge and description* (New York: Routledge, 2011a), 16.

21 . MCA Australia, “Cornelia Parker Artist Interview,” Nov 15, 2019, YouTube video interview, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_gRHDBpOYI&t=6s.



Solidify

Methods of solidification capture emerging material agency in its physicality and freezes moments of animacy in mould-making. By solidifying materiality, I aim to induce a sense of recognition between subject and object. Gell explores this in his description of a human devotee observing an object. “What the devotee sees is the idol looking at him or her, performing an act of looking, mirroring his or her own.”²² Through solidification I am invoking this mimetic, capturing the moment of interaction between material bodies.

Solidified artefacts reveal their inner agency through an exterior skin. These skins become the spatialised artefacts of the installation. In visual artist Pipilotti Rist’s projected video installations, immersive projections submerge the human and nonhuman in a united jelly-like state. As Rist attests, “I don’t make any separation between our body and nature, we are an organic structure.”²³ Similarly, Ingold discusses how “we would learn more by engaging directly with the materials themselves, following what happens to them as they circulate, mix with one another, solidify and dissolve in the formation of more or less enduring things. We discover, then, that materials are active.”²⁴ Through solidification (recasting sugar’s fluid body in bronze), sugar’s material voice remains.

22. Gell, *Art and Agency*, 118

23. Louisiana Channel (Christian Lund), “Pipilotti Rist Interview: Freeing the Wonderlight,” April 30, 2019, video, 6:38, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjmmAzS63H8>.

24. Ingold, *Being Alive*, 18.

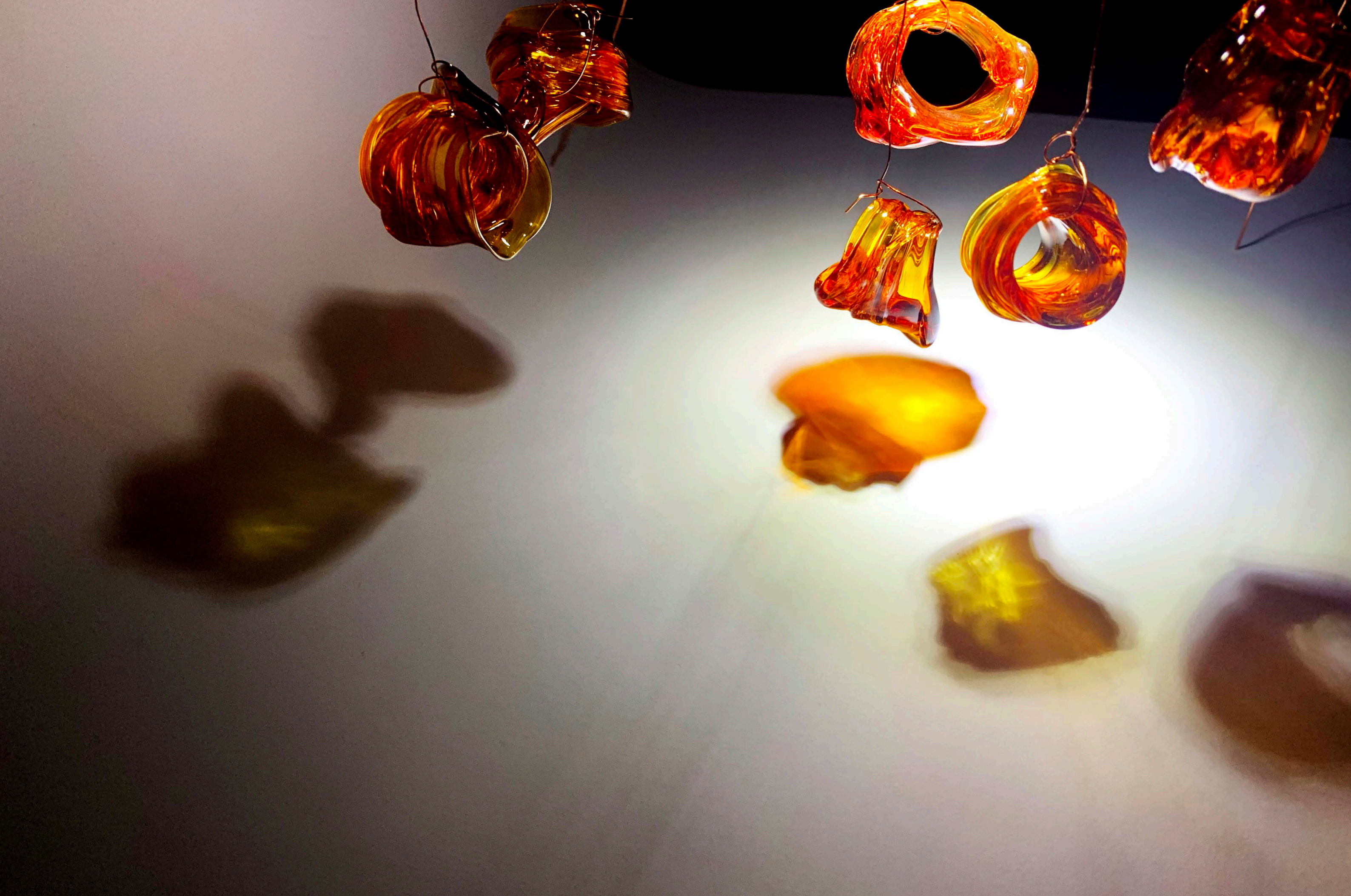


Fig. 16 Downard, Taylor. *Bonds of Agency*; caramelised sugar, copper wire, light, 2021.



Part Two: Bonds of Agency and Social Relations

The absent ring left an indent in the wearer's finger, a band of pale skin. Along this naked ravine now flowed an agitated emotional state. Her sense of loss made me consider how we tether ourselves to objects and how their material forces take possession of us. Reflecting on this, I became aware that the role of loss had become a central motif within my work. The absence of the ring, dissolution of self (through marriage), the lost wax casting process, the dissolving sugar, and the casting of shadows embody a sense of disconnection.

To question how rituals animated bodies, binding them to one another (subjects to objects and subjects to subjects) I chose the liminal space of the wedding ceremony. To make connections, I sought practitioners who occupied similar liminal spaces.



Fig. 18 Exchange of Rings
Photograph: Gaitano and Lorraine Afendoulis, Evangelismos Cathedral (Greek Orthodox Church), Wellington, 1967.



Fig. 19 The Joining of Hands
Photograph: *My Grandparents Greek Orthodox Wedding: Gaitano and Lorraine Afendoulis,* Cathedral (Greek Orthodox Church), Wellington, 1967.



Fig. 20 The Crowning
Photograph: *My Grandparents Greek Orthodox Wedding: Gaitano and Lorraine Afendoulis*,
Evangelismos Cathedral (Greek Orthodox Church), Wellington, 1967.



Fig. 21 The Ceremonial Walk
Photograph: *My Grandparents Greek Orthodox Wedding: Gaitano and Lorraine Afendoulis*,
Evangelismos Cathedral (Greek Orthodox Church), Wellington, 1967.

Marriage Sacraments of the Greek Orthodox Church

The Rings:

The bride's ring is displaced between her and the groom's finger three times, followed by the groom's ring.

The Candles:

The bride and groom hold candles throughout the service as a symbol of their spiritual willingness as a couple to receive Christ.

The Joining of Hands:

The priest invokes God to "join these servants, unite them in one mind and flesh" while placing the groom and the bride's hands together. The hands remain joined throughout the service to symbolize the "oneness" of their love.

The Crowning:

The crowns (joined together with ribbon) are exchanged three times over the heads of the bride and groom as witness to the sealing of the union.

The Common Cup:

The drinking of wine serves to impress upon the couple that, from this moment on, they will share everything in life, joys as well as sorrows, and they are to "bear one another's burdens."

The Ceremonial Walk:

The priest leads the couple around the circulating table. These first steps as partners are to emphasize the focus of their "life's walk" together.

The Blessing:

The bride and groom return to their places, and the priest lifts the crowns from their heads. The marriage ceremony ends with words of blessing to the newlyweds.²⁵

25. Manolis Kellis, "Our Wedding Ceremony and its Symbolism," Web MIT Edu: Manoli, accessed June 1, 2022, <https://web.mit.edu/manoli/www/wedding/ceremony.html>.



*Fig. 22 The Sugar Rings Social Milieu
The agency of the wedding ring binds, connects, and intertwines material bodies while also being bound in its physical form, ringed, encircled, and enclosed. The binding and transformational agency of the ring is a result of the binding rituals of the wedding ceremony and a byproduct of metal's metamorphic power (the alchemical transformations it has undertaken). For an audience to experience the binding force of the wedding ring and become familiar with its magic, I decided to represent its agency in physical and sensory forms. The sticky, binding and transmuting matter of caramelised sugar became a metaphor, and channel for the wedding ring's material force to be experienced and understood within my installation practice.*

Beginning with my mother's stories of her marriage to my father in a Greek Orthodox marriage ceremony, I reflect on how ancient rituals of heat, light, reiterative binding, and circular motifs formed between bodies in motion have anchored this research. My mother spoke of how lighting candles and the animation of heat, light, and shadows, along with the priest's chanting, created a sacred atmosphere. In the ceremony, circular and cyclical motifs and totemic objects (rings, crowns, ribbon) move in repetitions of three, reiterating the melding of bodies.

In Greek culture, objects are critical and influential participants in the wedding service. Instead of exchanging vows, ceremonial objects pass between the bride and groom's bodies. Orthodox Greeks view artefacts as vehicles of embodied agency that help the marriage bodies transform. Creating a passage through the transitional state—unwed to wed—understanding the social relations formed with things, allowed me to perceive the Greek Orthodox wedding ceremony as an animist ritual.

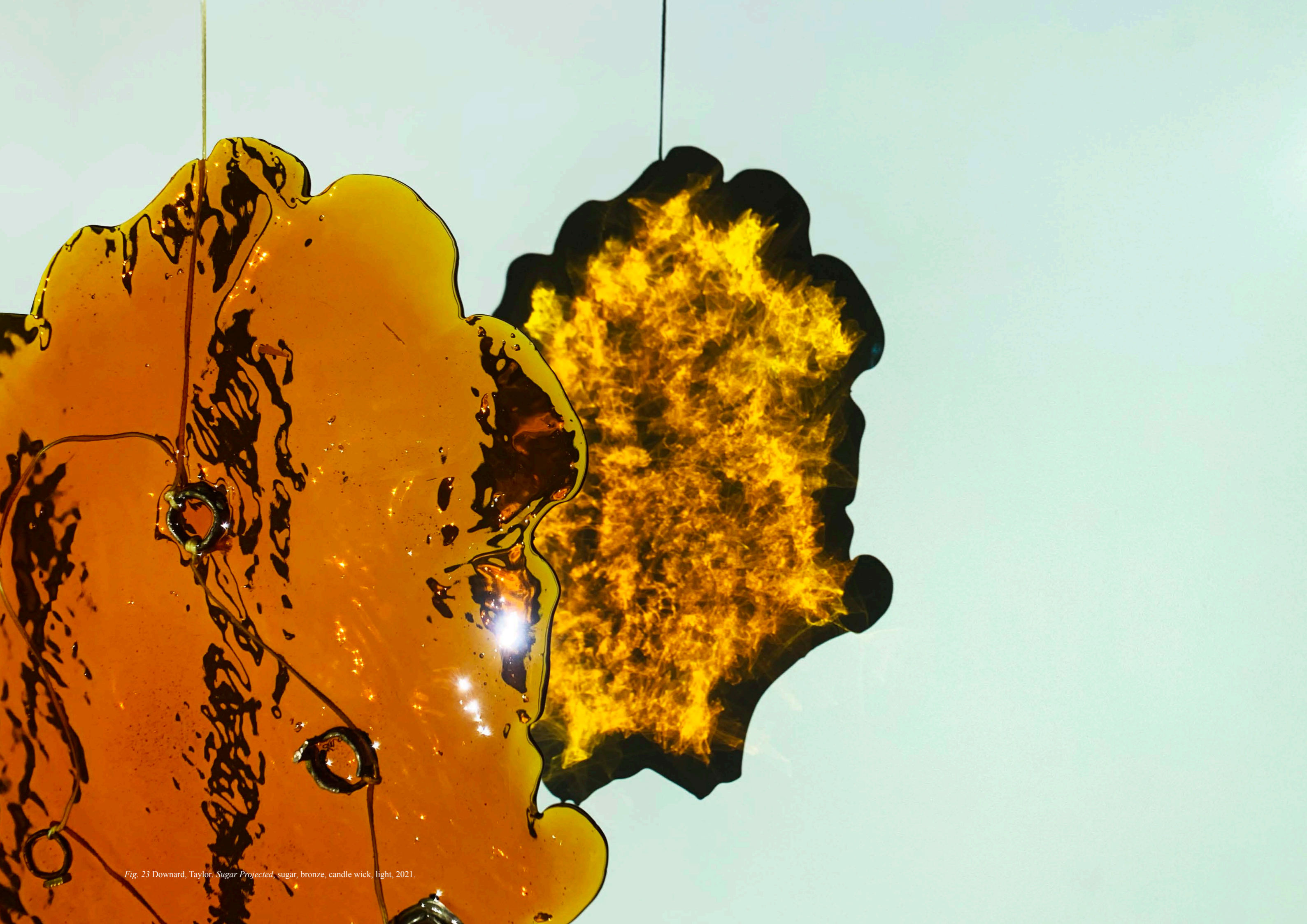


Fig. 23 Downard, Taylor. *Sugar Projected*, sugar, bronze, candle wick, light, 2021.



Fig. 24 Downard, Taylor. *Wax Ring Tree One*, wax, 2022.

Sticky Unions

Untethering and drawing these marriage rituals apart unveiled their stickiness. Each of the rituals performed in the ceremony reinforces the union of bodies. Objects and subjects combine in oneness. When fashioning the ring trees present in my installation, I considered the union of bodies and Gell's assertions about "social agents" forming participatory bodies.²⁶ In the context of the wedding ceremony, the marriage bodies (bride/groom) are "patients."²⁷ While the ceremonial objects are "agents," discharging their binding powers upon the "patients" through a series of ritualised actions. The ring tree, as an emblem, takes on the agential role created by the ceremonial objects present at my parents' wedding.

The ring tree symbolises the bound state of the rings in the wedding ceremony. They also speak to the crowns tethered by ribbon and the joining of hands. Its material processes of heat, flow, and circulation (inpouring and outpouring of materials during lost wax casting) pay tribute to the burning of candles, the common cup (where liquidity is shared) and the ceremonial walk (as the tree embodies an internal circuit). These material discourses establish the ring tree as a ceremonial object imbued with binding magic.

Fig. 25

Artist Christian Boltanski shares my fascination with the ritualised. His installations use heat, light and binding to draw the bodies of his subjects and objects together. Boltanski's installation *Leçons de ténèbres* has a familiarity reminiscent of my ceremonial ring trees. This tethered map of portraits takes the form of an abstract genealogical tree— notions of loss, remembrance and reverence ripple within a liminal space created by the installation.

26. Gell, *Art and Agency*, 22.

27. Gell, 22.

Fig. 25 Christian Boltanski, *Monument: The Children of Dijon*, 1985-6, photographic portraits, bulbs, wires, metal frame, Salpêtrière Chapel, Paris. https://kewenig.com/viewing_room/christian-boltanski-portraits.

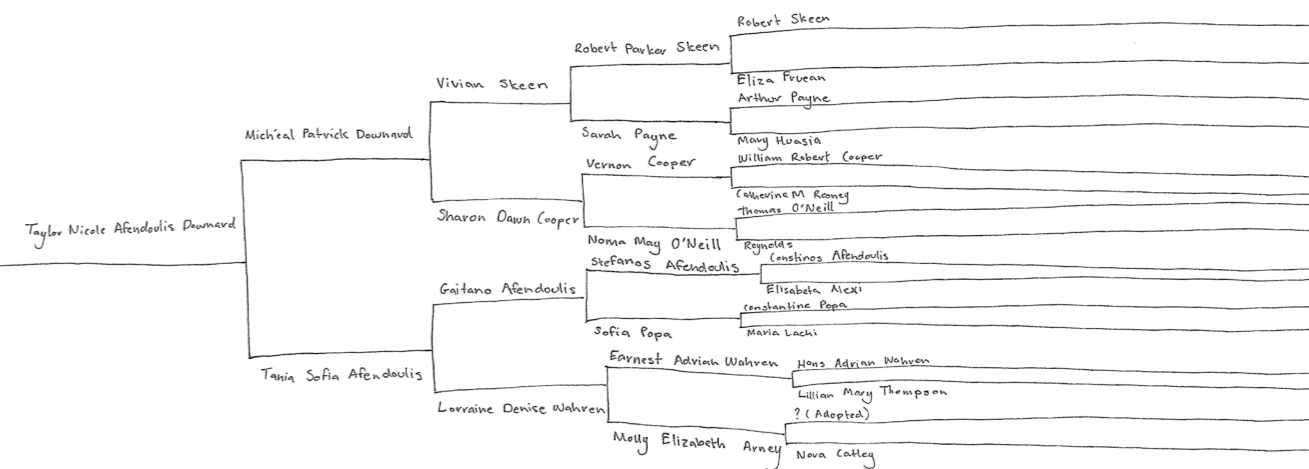


Fig. 27

Notions of loss and genealogy manifest within the tree's form and material processes. Its body, a ghostly relic, commemorates the fluid bodies it once hosted (sugar and wax). They evoke the likenesses of a genealogical tree, with its tracery of branches marking familial reproduction. Ancestral trees render connubial bodies and delineate mixed bloodlines flowing from bodily engagements. These kinship lines reminded me of the sprues that act as conduit systems on the ring trees and draw bodies together. Along these lines (and sprues) flows the agency of the wedding ring.

It was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them. The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man.
Michel Foucault, 1966.

French philosopher Michel Foucault describes how “similitudes” create a sticky, uniting force, allowing us to devise social relationships through shared likenesses.²⁸ Through neo-animism, I perceived affinities between the wedding ring, the ring tree and the genealogical tree, as an unfolding. I, too, became entangled within this meshwork of resemblances during the intimacy of making. The symbolism and rituals of the wedding ceremony, evident in my encounters with materials, have also shaped the installation's design.

28. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2001), 19.

Fig. 26 Downard, Taylor. *Bones of the Ring Tree*, bronze, 2022.
Fig. 27 Downard, Taylor. *My Genealogical Tree*, digital drawing, 2022.



Fig. 28 Downard, Taylor. *Sugar Projection*, sugar and light, 2022.

Animate Materials

Being an animist designer, I consider materials possess a soul. This belief is evident in the ancient word, *anima*, which means breath or spirit. Through heat, the material's spiritual being was released. Taussig suggests that "the sensuous moment of knowing includes a yielding and mirroring of the knower in the unknown, of thought in its object."²⁹ I surrendered to sugar, imitating it and allowing its *anima* to direct me.

In Latin, the life-breath was known as spiritus or anima.
David Mayor, 2011.

The Affinities of Life, Breathe and Fire

Anima is embodied in the fluidic nature of the ring tree's design which anticipates flow and breath. In the tree's initial wax state, I bound each ring twice, once to the trunk and once to the tree's base (the pour hole). These are connected to the bottom of the wax tree and are called air sprues (so the air can escape the mould during the metal pour). To me, these sprues are more than vents. They are channels through which the metal's breath runs as its body solidifies, reminding me of the bubbles of breath that emerged from the molten sugar. By binding the rings to the tree, I created an internal circuit, a passage for materials and their breath to inpour and outpour.

Fig. 29

Artist Cornelia Parker's work is often metaphorically perceived as breath. Parker's installations craft transitional moments that leave her audience feeling caught in a state of suspension. Her rituals engender metamorphosis within found objects, allowing the audience to reimagine them as animate and dynamic entities. As an artist/maker, Parker embodies the role of a magician, which is evident in her ability to breathe life back into seemingly inanimate objects.

²⁹ Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 34.

Fig. 29 Cornelia Parker, *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*, 1991, wood, metal, plastic, ceramic, paper, textile and wire, Tate Gallery, Liverpool. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/parker-cold-dark-matter-an-exploded-view-t06949>.



Fig. 30 Downard, Taylor. *Sugars Breath*, sugar, bronze, 2022

Fig. 31

Like Parker, Aotearoa New Zealand based contemporary jeweller Karl Fritsch understands the inherent life force within his materials. Fritsch is fascinated by the material processes of casting. While most jewellers perceive the casting process as a means to an end, Fritsch chooses to explore these moments of flux which becomes evident in his final artifacts' unconventional treatments and forms. Fritsch describes how his practice was guided by the fluidic bodies of wax and metal.

The organic malleability and plasticity of the material gradually seduced me into working in a more spontaneous manner. The shapes have become larger and less inhibited ...Initially the pieces have a "not" designed quality, clumsy, sluggish and thick. But the metal appears mystical, as if the nature of the material has created this indefinite shape itself.
Karl Fritsch, 2007.

In the way that materials within my practice transfixed me, the anima of wax "seduced" Fritsch. This spell of seduction bewitched his material imaginary, guiding him to venture beyond the restrictions of Western imaginary into outlandish nonconformity.

Obviously, then, the burning is of some significance for releasing the soul of the entity burned, activating and bringing it into the world as an effective agent in a process parallel if not identical to the healer activating the spirit-power of his wooden figurines by chanting to and with them.
Michael Taussig, 1993.

As Taussig suggests, molten states in the jewellery production process galvanised my practice. In heat, I recognised the animist worldview of my Greek ancestors, the Hellenes, to perceive fire's power and life force. Hellenistic beliefs held the soul as "atomic fire, an innate heat, a vital flame in living matter."³⁰

30. David Mayor, "Vitalism," in *Fundamentals of Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, ed. Marc Micozzi (St. Louis, Missouri: Saunders/Elsevier, 2011), 5.

Fig. 31 Karl Fritsch, *Ring*, 2002-3, ring of silver set with gemstones, Royal College of Art. London, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O249274/ring-fritsch-karl/>.

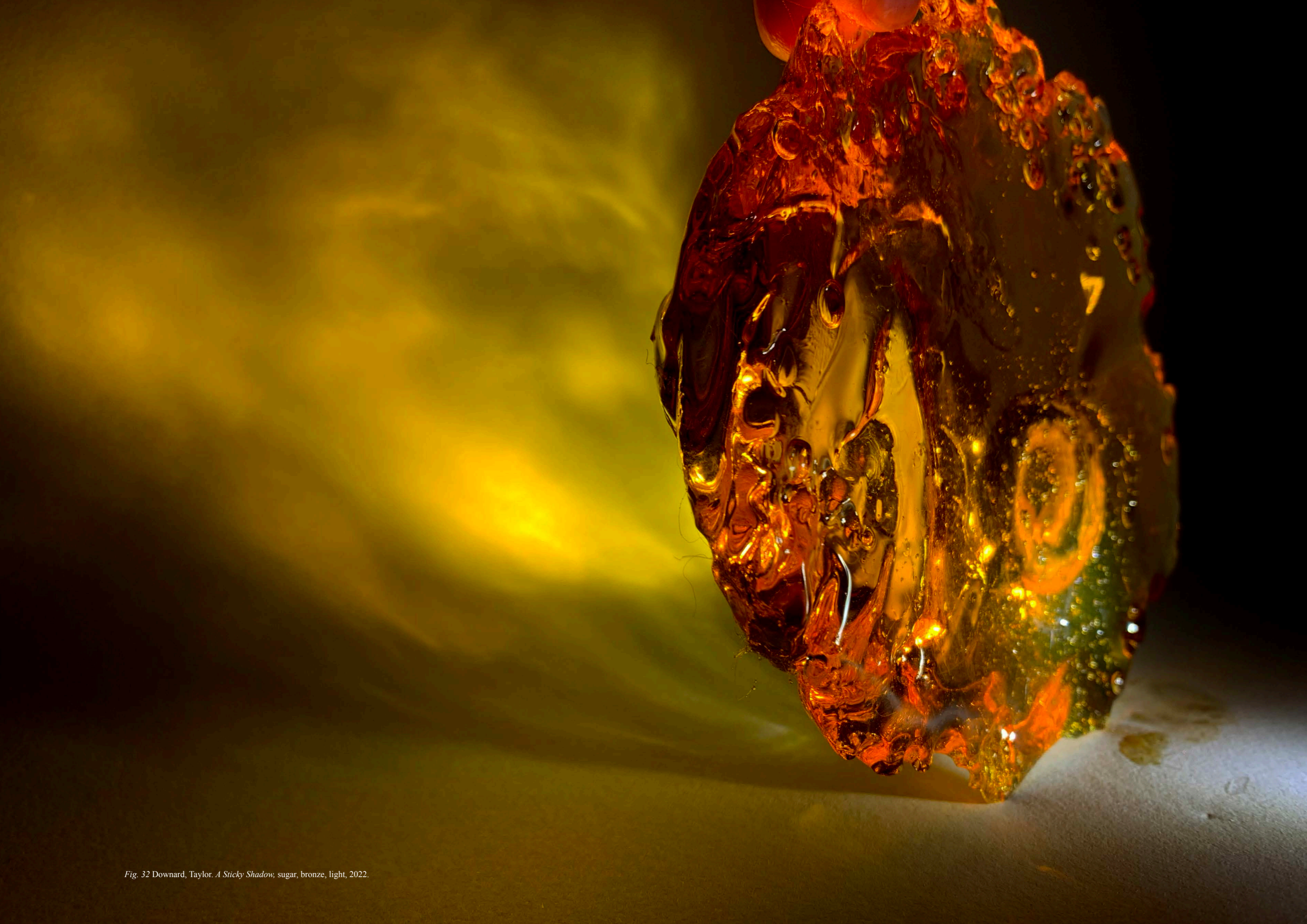


Fig. 32 Downard, Taylor. *A Sticky Shadow*, sugar, bronze, light, 2022.

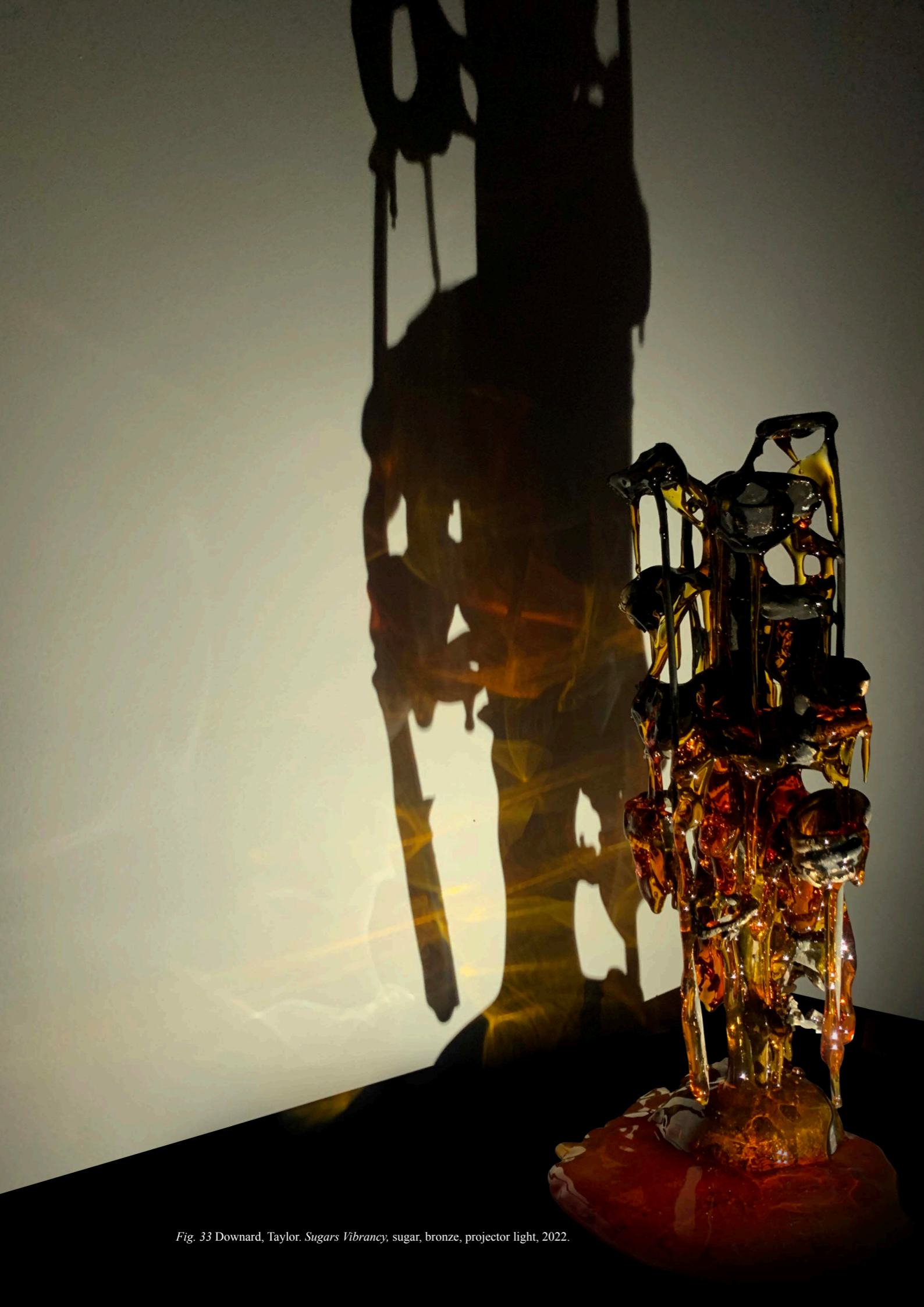


Fig. 33 Downard, Taylor. *Sugars Vibrancy*, sugar, bronze, projector light, 2022.

Fetish and Totem

The net result of the regression whereby devotee's and idol's perspectives become logically interdigitated with one another in this way is a kind of optical oscillation in which idol's and devotee's perspectives shift back and forth with such rapidity that interpersonal boundaries are effaced and 'union' is achieved.

Alfred Gell, 1997.

Gell's description of the idol-subject relationship reminds me of my making with sugar. Instead of an "optical oscillation", as Gell describes, I view our correspondence as felt vibrations. Felt exchange is elemental within my practice. Making with sugar has become akin to acting with sugar. Together, we enact each other's desires. I mimic the sugar's performance, drawing in and out, enfolding we come together.

The ring trees are fetishized, totemic objects (objects that embody or are symbolic of a certain quality or agency, worshipped for their magical powers). I perceive the trees as totem poles (a pole on which totems hang). Each sugar ring branched from the tree, forming a portrait of this entwined agency, representing our marriage/union as maker and material.

The existence of most things we call the idols... these, like films peeled off from the surface of things, fly to and fro through the air ... I say then that pictures of things and thin shapes are emitted from things off their surface, to which an image serves as a kind of film, or name it if you like a rind, because such image bears an appearance and form like to the thing whatever it is from whose body it is shed and wanders forth.

Alfred Gell, 1997.

Gell quotes Lucretius (c.99 – c.55 BCE) when describing his notion of "distributed personhood", which I characterised as *contagious affect*.³¹ When I poured the layer of sugar skin over the bronze bones of the ring tree, a vibration occurred, rippling outwards. The sugar held the ring trees in its grasp. The tree's power became subject to the contagion of the sugar. Within the milieu of the installation, these trees give off shadows and sway with the movement of light and the melting sugar, their being pools enchanting and mesmerising the audience through a comingled sensuousity. They have become infected and are therefore infectious objects. Gell would call this form of spell-work "Captivation or fascination—the demoralisation produced by the spectacle of unimaginable virtuosity—ensures the spectator becoming trapped within the index because the index embodies agency which is essentially indecipherable."³²

31. Gell, *Art and Agency*, 104.

32. Gell, 71.



Fig. 34 Downard, Taylor. *Becoming Entangled*, sugar, bronze, 2022.

Material Imaginaries

Fig. 35

Altering subject-object relationships is a practice undertaken by English artist Cornelia Parker. Parker is interested in transforming objects (objects of every day that are often unseen) and, in doing so, changing the way we experience them. Within her installation, the *Wedding Ring Drawing: Circumference of a Living Room*, Parker showcases two 22-carat gold wedding rings, which have metamorphosed into a piece of drawn-out wire. Through a rearrangement of matter, Parker reimagined their subject-object relations. Like my uncut ring tree, Parker's rings became unwearable; they were no longer objects of use to subjects, extracted from their functionality.

The instances of gold in these specific drawings demonstrate the absolute contingency and mutuality of subjects and objects— no fixed meaning is inherent to the object/matter 'gold' prior to its materialisation... rather, its manifold emergent meanings are realised (multiply, differently) in the agency of drawing. Gold, here materialised through drawing, reminds us of the vitality of matter, a vitality that engenders meaning through affective relations with embodied subjects and polymorphous discourses, sedimented over time.

Marsha Meskimmon and Phil Sawdon, 2016.

Artist and writer Phil Sawdon and Professor of Art History and Theory Marsha Meskimmon's description of Parker's drawing crystallised my thinking about my work. This notion of "*affective relations with embodied subjects and polymorphous discourses, sedimented over time*," being particularly relevant to my practice. Initially each of the bronze rings embellishing the ring tree were crafted from sugar. Sugar's infectious substance left a residual stain on my hands as a maker, and on the wearer's finger. Through the process of casting, I noticed the sugar's agency lingered, rematerialising as a stain produced by the bronze. Wearing the bronze rings left a green taint. Sugar's agency contaminated every process. Aotearoa New Zealand Artist Christopher Braddock calls

Fig. 35 Cornelia Parker, *Wedding Ring Drawing (the circumference of a living room)*, 1996. Two 22-carat-gold wedding rings drawn into wire. Courtesy Frith Street Gallery, London. <https://www.icaboston.org/art/cornelia-parker/wedding-ring-drawing-circumference-living-room>.



Fig. 36 Degraded Grains of Sugar
Sugar in its granulated state represents a multiplicity of separate beings, each grain an individual entity. As I studied the sugar, it laid dormant and unspoken, motionless and emotionless. I felt my eyes become weakened by Western perception. Sugar's loss of words in this stale state of being bestowed a mirror in front of humanity; the impact that cultivation and processing of sugar have on the environment is inherent in each grain's detached state of being. I understand society's refinery of raw sugar to be of a similar process to the refinery of Western material imaginaries. Both stripped and dispossessed of natural properties/potentialities.

this “contagious animism.”³³ A notion resident within the Greek Orthodox marriage rituals. For example, the wedding crowns tethered and bound by ribbon (which oscillate between the heads of the bride and groom) suffuse the marriage bodies with their binding agency.

Contagious animism materialises in my work as residue. In my installation *The Liquid State of Love* (mentioned previously), the sugar gems dissolved, leaving traces on the gallery walls. The unrelenting fluidity of sugar plagued my material imaginary. Sugar, I saw, wasn't just animated; it was a metaphor for the liquidity of love, the dissolution of self through marriage, and the stains upon the white bedsheet after the consummation of marriage. Within my practice, the ring becomes this relationship that stains or marks, marking the gallery, walls, and wearer's skin.

Sugar as a Fetishized Commodity

The commodity yet conceals in its innermost being not only the mysteries of the socially constructed nature of value and price, but also all its particulate sensuousity— and this subtle interaction of sensuous perceptibility and imperceptibility accounts for the fetish quality, the animism and spiritual glow of commodities.

Michael Taussig, 1993.

Sugar's all-consuming stickiness was the medium through which I tested the binding magic of the wedding ring. I had to consider the sugar's historical undercurrent crystallising the social and political complexities of my use of sugar. Refined sugar is a product representative of consumerism, industrialisation, colonisation, and slavery. Sugar as a fetishised commodity holds the Western world spellbound. Anthropologist Sidney Mintz explains in her book *Sweetness and Power* that the use of sugar as an ornament emerged in the Middle Ages when it was still a rare and precious substance.³⁴ In this period, the rich used sugar to craft edible sculptures, called subtleties, to parade in banquets of the likes of King Henry V, as symbols of wealth and power. The wedding cake is a modern-day subtlety. The ring tree, bejewelled and garnished with caramelised sugar, performs as a mimetic of the wedding cake. The wedding cake's monumentality and its fundamental purpose – to be ingested – evokes a state of cohesion (within the wedding party) through shared consumption. The sugar-coated ring trees summon a sensory indulgence (one that consumes the subject's imaginary) and, like the wedding cake, bind the consumers/audience in a glutinous state of unity.

33. Christopher Braddock, “Contagious Participation Magic's Power to Affect,” *Performance Research* 16, 4 (2011): 98, 10.1080/13528165.2011.606056.

34. Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: the Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin US, 1986), 89.



Fig. 37 Downard, Taylor. *The Wedding Cake*, plaster and wax, 2022.

The wedding cake is a symbolic artefact within the wedding ceremony, the central ritual of the ceremonial feast. Sociologist Paul Sullins speaks of the wedding cake as a totemic object, symbolic of the bride, her virginity and fertility.³⁵ In the 20th century, the wedding cake was called the “bride’s cake.”³⁶ The cake is emblematic of giving up and giving over, the dissolution of self through marriage, time, and traditionally the loss of virginity. I realised the alchemical heat produced through the consummation of marriage (physical intimacy) is transformational.

Fig.38

*Miss Havisham’s body itself—a fleshly oxymoron— which like the wedding feast has decayed within the virgin bridal dress—a nature morte in which perfect ripeness has tipped over into corruption.*³⁷

A character in Charles Dickens’s novel *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham, is jilted at the altar. She grows old, never removing her wedding dress and living amongst the decay of her wedding breakfast, which remains untouched, rotting and adorned with cobwebs. The imagined love that never came to fruition eventually consumes Miss Havisham. The end to Miss Havisham’s misery (her failure as a Victorian woman – unmarried and childless) comes in the form of fire when she burns to death. Within this rather sad and misogynistic tale (like traditional concepts of marriage), fire is a liberating energy.³⁸

The notion of the subtlety is evident in artist Kara Walker’s installation *A Subtlety*. Walker’s installation exhibits a giant 35-foot sphinx sculpted from refined sugar. Accompanying the sphinx are figures of young blackamoor boys cast in caramelised sugar, melting and liquifying into pools of blood-like residue. This repossession of

35. Paul Sullins, “No Wedding’s a Wedding without a Cake: The History and Significance of the Wedding Cake,” *The Natural Family* 31, 2 (2017): 159, 10.2139/ssrn.3081990.

36. Sullins, 159.

37. Sara Thornton, “The Burning of Miss Havisham: Dickens, Fire and the “Fire-Baptism,”” in *Bloom’s Modern Critical Interpretations: Great Expectations*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2010), 84.

38. Thornton, ed Bloom, 87.

Fig. 38 Green, Charles. *Pip and Miss Havisham*, illustration, 1898.



Fig. 39 Downard, Taylor. *The Ring Tree Elevations*, wax, 2022.



Fig. 40 Downard, Taylor, *Sugars Specular Colours*, sugar, bronze, 2022.

colour (caramelisation of sugar) and dissolution of bodies speaks of the slave history, colourism and racism inherent in sugar production. Although not directly dealing with sugar's associations to the African slave trade like Walker, I am critiquing marriage as a socio-political and economic transaction; the trading of bodies for goods; an example is the wedding dowry (traditionally paid by the bride's family). The dowry is a means of holding capital on the female body—an exchange of wealth and property between men.

Through my work, I aim to critique economically derived notions of preciousness. A wedding ring is typically made from precious metals. Substituting gold or silver for a matter that dissolves, plays with value and time. A metal ring lasts for generations while the sugar band is gone in a matter of hours. Besides the sugar's impermanence, bronze tarnishes with wear, reacting to the environment and the body of the wearer. Atmospheric forces forever alter both substances.

Who through Your man-befriending love transformed a rib of Adam the forefather into a woman, and blessed them and said, "Increase and multiply, and have dominion over the earth," and, by the conjoining, declared them both to be one member, for because of this a man shall forsake his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and the two shall be one flesh-and whom God has joined together let not man put asunder.³⁹

The image of the wedding cake within the marriage ceremony is a totemic object, symbolic of the bride and her reproductive system, its strange floral form revealing her fruitfulness (and a fecundity linked to the genealogical tree). The cake represents not only the body consumed but also time. Time is a significant aspect of my work. In the installation, time alters relations. It writes in rivulets words of love. The slow dissolution of the body of the work reveals its metallic substrate. Time is like the skin of sugar encasing the pieces below, whose acid bite eats away the forms while making them appear jewel-like and alive. The material imaginary of sugar seduces Walker and me. Walker explains, "it was important for me to have figures made out of a substance that is so temporal, it is so subject to change."⁴⁰ The ephemeral nature of sugar and its ability to transmute objects and produce specular colours arouses my belief in animism.

39. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. "Liturgical Texts of the Orthodox Church: The Service of Marriage," 2021, <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-service-of-the-crowning-the-service-of-marriage>.

40. Ian Forster, "A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby: Kara Walker," *Art 21*, May 23, 2014, 7:06, <https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/kara-walker-a-subtlety-or-the-marvelous-sugar-baby-short/>.



Fig. 41 Downard, Taylor. *Ethereal Cosmos*, bronze ring tree, sugar, light, 2022.



Fig. 42 Downard, Taylor. *The Circularity of Stickiness*, bronze rings, wire, sugar, 2021.

Part Three: Forming Social Relations through Sugar: A Critical Discussion of Practice

Lighting the Way

Within my installation, light creates chaotic disturbances of the visual realm. Alternatively, darkness allows blurs, muffles, and create points of focus. Together they create a sublime theatre, allowing the luminosity of the sugar to cast its spell. I imagine the shadows cast by these sugared bodies as materialisations of their vitality. The micro-cosmic worlds of the rings trapped in sugar expand and submerge in the light, touching the walls and the viewer with their eerie projections.

The spectacle of the imagery allows us to correspond with the sugar through bodily language, to identify our agency's mimicry, and to see the mirror that obscurely instates a sense of familiarity. They become whispering traces of animation and ghostly incarnations of our expiration. We become embodiments of the matrimonial jewellery embedded within, taking passage through the liminal space of the sugar together, ready to emerge with the knowledge of an animist and the transient experience of the sublime. The boundary between subject and object wavers, liquidates and dissolves.

Artist Christian Boltanski uses rituals of light and shadow within his installation *Shadow Theatre* (Boltanski, 1984-1997). Boltanski's positioning of lights transforms his miniature puppets, augmenting their reality. They enact a spectral shadow dance through light, haunting the space and falling over the viewer. I conceived the casting of shadows (within both Boltanski and my work) as an incorporeal drawing, creating a space of liminality. Within the flickering atmosphere created by light, one witnesses sugar's inner being (anima, spirit, life, soul) materialise. Taussig described this as an "unstoppable merging of the object of perception with the body of the perceiver."⁴¹ Immersed in the experience, the viewer becomes a witness to the shadowy world of the ceremony.

⁴¹ Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 24.



Fig. 43 Downard, Taylor. *The Circularity of Stickiness Two*, bronze rings, wire, sugar, 2021.

Liminal States

In Greek culture, weddings and funerals prepare a person to transition into a new state of being. The rituals and the ceremonial objects ease the body's passage through this liminal state. Marriage and death are linked, both being rites of passage that transform the bodies in irreversible ways, traditionally through the tethering of spiritual bodies in marriage (or the loss of virginity) and the loss of the body's spirit in death. For the ancient Hellenes, death was the only way of unbinding the infinitely bound circle, the only form of disrupting the infinite flow of embodied agency within the rings. Victor Turner describes:

During the intervening "liminal" period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the "passenger") are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of clearly defined and "structural."⁴²

42. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: The University of Rochester, 1966), 95.



Liberating Forms

Using my finger as a platform to compose, the sugar wound around until its extremities met in union—a foreshadowing moment, metaphoric for the rituals that eternally bind two bodies.

Crafting the rings, I would use my right hand to wrap the sugar in an annular motion around my left finger. This circular gesture would continue until the sugar bound itself into an enclosed form. I found that the sugar had its own intentions moving and folding, stretching and layering itself into distinctive, vitally flowing forms. During this performance a transfer of identity took place; my fingerprints were inscribed into the rings and remnants of the sugar bound itself to my hands. In the rings there was an inner poetics, the flux of magic which is sugar. Gell expresses this as “‘truth to materials’, the idea that it behoves the artist (or craftsman, architect, etc.) to make from his materials what ‘they’ want, rather than what he wants... a matter of ‘liberating’ forms which inhere (within the material).”⁴³

43. Gell, *Art and Agency*, 30.



Fig. 45 Animacy as Lively Communion

When I heated the sugar to the hard crack stage (180 degrees Celsius) it appeared to yearn to end its stable state. Its temperament became malleable, unfolding its own shapes and bodily presence. This became a vital stage in our haptic engagement, the point at which I could pour the sugar onto the bench to let it cool before attempting to interact with it. As I poured, I noticed the linked bodies becoming a bridge. The sugar, the pot, the spoon, the bench, the drips of residue on the stovetop, my clothes and my skin became tethered.

The sugar was reluctant to leave its cohesive body, prolonging its separation for as long as possible. As I drew the sugar, our bodies became fluid extensions of one another. We moved in the same effortless rhythm; our bodies flowed as one into and out of each other's grasp.

Through sensory conversation with sugar, I began to appreciate its qualities and temperament. If I were too eager to make, the sugar would repel my hands with a burn. The sugar would become cold and unwilling if I was reluctant or slow. It would refuse to participate, turning brittle and breaking. It was temperamental, sensitive, and subject to change. I had to find ways of working with it, respecting its mood. Recognising this I chose to pull only small lumps from its puddle on the bench, just enough material for a ring. Drawing these pieces of sugar apart caused threads of sugar to expand and stretch with sticky agency. Each ring moulded to the curvature of my fingers, together we enacted an intimate narrative.



Fig. 46 Downard, Taylor. *Sugars Breath*, sugar brought to boil, 2021.



Fig. 47 *Yielding to Sugar: Stages of Caramelisation*

Through heat, the animate materiality of sugar manifests. Alchemically shifting and transmuting, I realised that fire engenders life. Caramelisation caused sugar's substance to ripple through different states of being, shifting its complexion and imbuing space with an intoxicating sweetness. Sugar's body oozed and trickled, seeped, and dripped. It flowed to its own poetics.



Making with sugar formed a relationship through felt/ sensory reciprocity, which I conceived as a material conversation and mediation



Fig. 49 Downard, Taylor. *Sugar Ring Three*, sugar, 2022.



Fig. 50 Being Undone Becoming One
To my distress, the first group of sugar rings slowly returned to their original fluid state. Initially the sugar's dissolution frustrated me but channelling my raw method and material imaginary, I quickly shifted my perceptions. I reimagined this as an act of defiance, a rendering of sugar's material agency. The sugar was unwilling to conform to my manipulation, it was a performance of material agency. This failure catalysed an awakening of the original curiosity expressed in my research, which asks how are matrimonial rings animate?



Fig. 51 Downard, Taylor. *Melting Sugar Ring Two*, sugar, 2022.



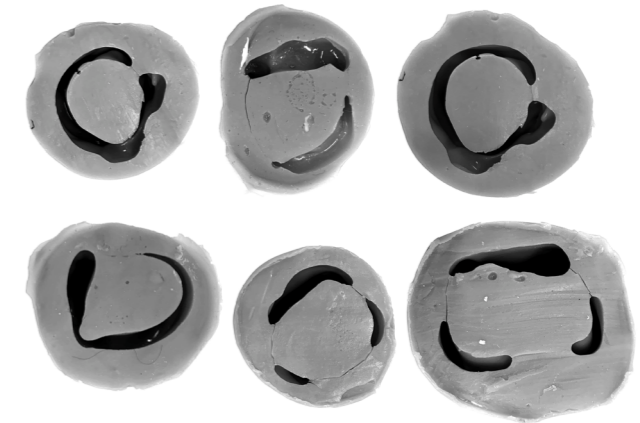
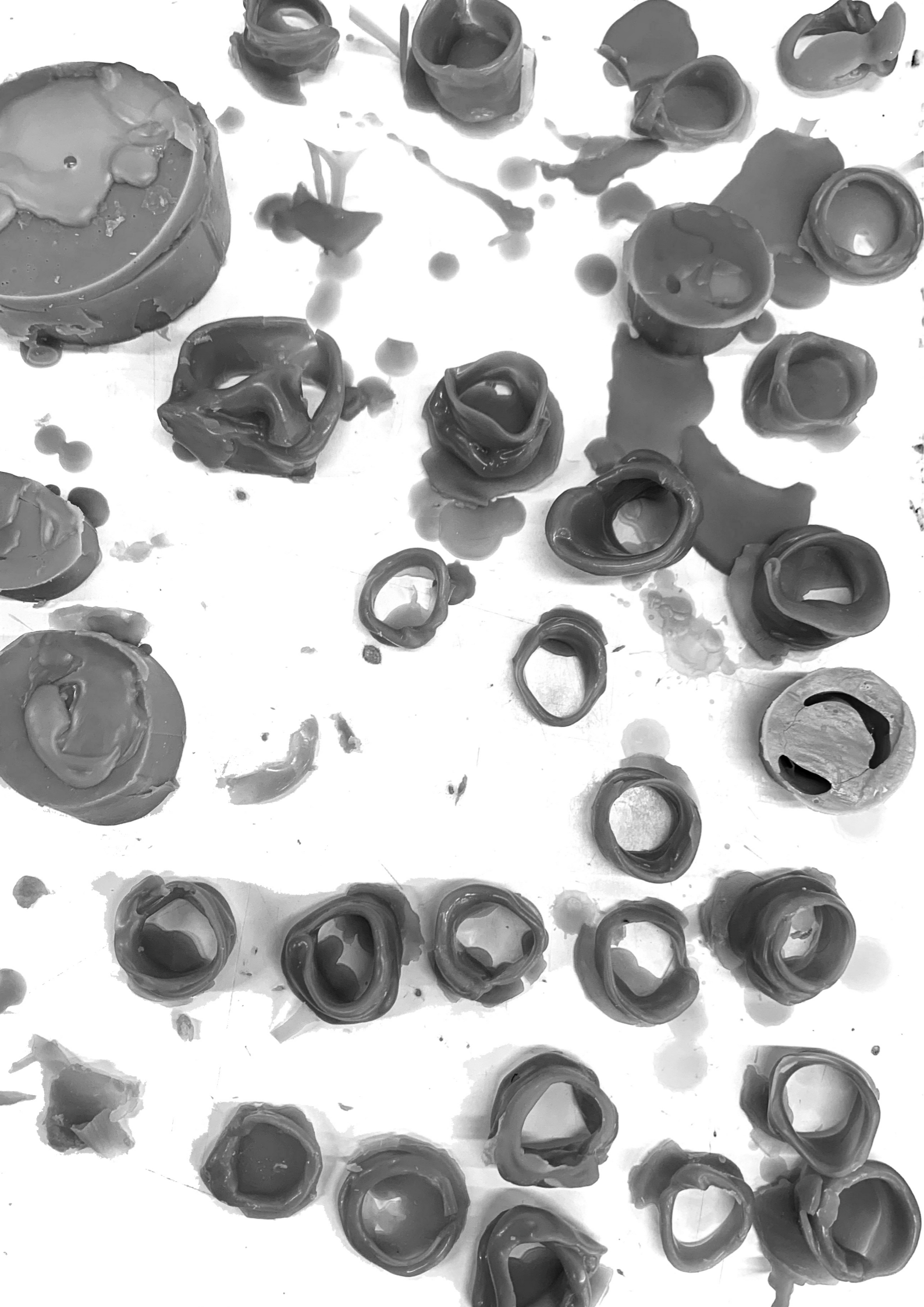


Fig. 54

Fig. 53 & 54 *Anthromorphism Aroused my Imaginary*

Prying the sugar rings from their silicon moulds revealed the rings' negative terrain. The moulds' interiority resembled my body (they were almost ear-like). A familiarity resonated within our shared fluid curvatures. Both the sugar rings and the interior of the moulds were anthromorphic. Gell describes how "features which apparently make the sphere more 'anthropomorphic,' do not just serve the purpose of making the sphere a more realistic 'depiction' of a human being, they render it more spiritual, more inward, by opening up *routes of access* to this inwardness."

Anthromorphism aroused my imaginary. It connected me to nonhuman material personhoods (the sugar rings and their mould). These bodily affinities helped me draw connections and kinships to the materials I was conversing with.

The empty state of the mould echoed a sense of loss, its void performed a yearning for fulfillment. Like the woman and her ring, the sugar ring and its mould were no longer whole, they were incomplete without one and other. I imagined their incorporal bodies (tethered souls) haunted the moulds interior just like the indentations on the womans finger haunted me. A projection of materials *contagious affect*.⁴⁴

The similarities between wax and sugar were evident in their ability to transform their substance. When I heated the microcrystalline (wax), it became translucent and mobile. As I poured the liquified wax into the moulds made from the sugar ring, it embodied their form. Yet, the wax didn't always stay within the dark interiority of the mould; it leaked and ran. To me, these became the bodily outpouring, the wax's poetic gestures, as it too had a mind of its own.

44 . Christopher Braddock, "Contagious Participation Magic's Power to Affect," *Performance Research* 16, 4, (2011): 98, 10.1080/13528165.2011.606056.

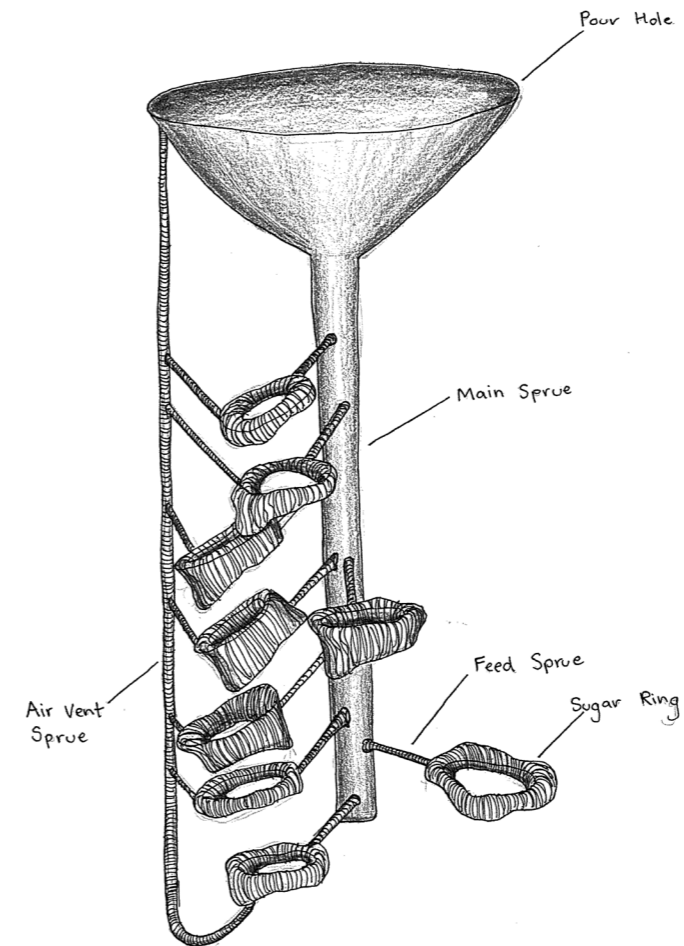


Fig. 56 *Lost Wax Casting as a Binding Ceremony*

Heating my wax tools under a flame, I held the tool between the two points of connection, creating a join or sprue running between the ring and the tree. The sprues create channels of connection. Alongside the connection for the mould to work there needs to be air sprues to ensure the wax's breath can circulate.

While fabricating the ring trees I found myself thinking of the wax as alchemical. Not only did it emulate the flux of the sugar, it foreshadowed the emergent form of the metal.

When I was crafting the ring trees, I became lost in the wax's agencies, its alchemical powers to transform and bind. With each ring that became fixed to the tree, a piece of myself adhered with it. A heat was ignited not only in the heated wax tool (which activated the wax to bind) but in the normally inattentive micro-muscles of my hand, holding the tool with intensity and precision. Shared heat and the practice of repetition (attaching each ring one by one) aligned our bodies. We became in tune, in sync. Intuitive to each other's locomotion. Through the reciprocity and intimacies of the haptic touch (the handmade), these felt qualities submerged our lifeworlds. Like the wedding ceremony, my jewellery practice is an act of what Gell describes as "social relations," between maker and material.

Fig. 55 Downard, Taylor. *Wax Ring Tree*, wax, 2022.

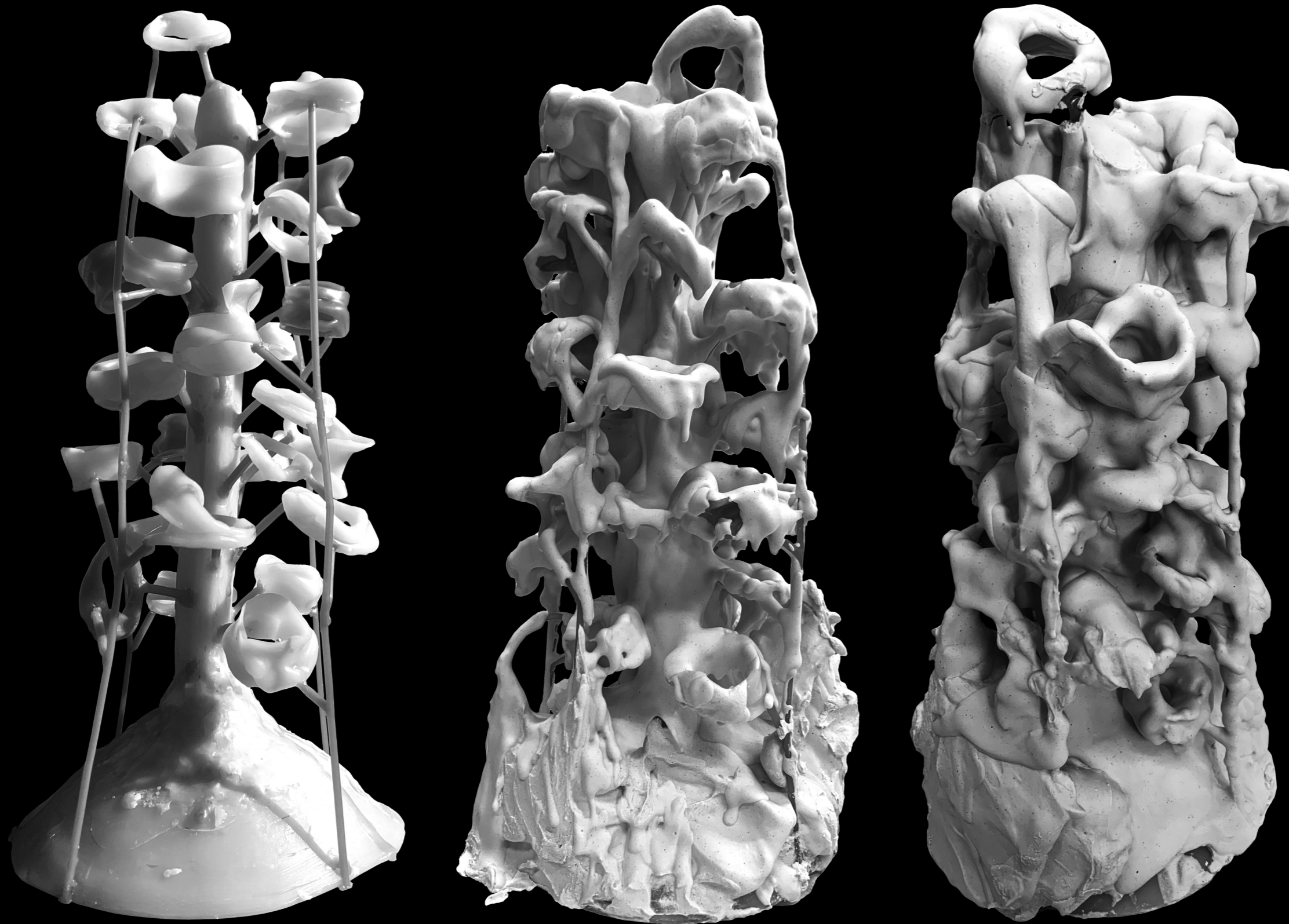


Fig. 57 Investment Mould Recipe:

Face Coat:

*1.75 parts investment mix
(50% casting plaster and
50% mech silica flour)*

Jacket Coat:

*1 part grog
1 part water
1.75 part investment*

The investment mould is the final step before the metal pour. Investment is made of a one-to-two mixture of silicon and plasticine to water. Once the solution thickened, I slowly dripped the investment onto the delicate wax tree. The investment process transformed the tree, draping it with mercurial rivulets.

The plastered ring tree had become breathless. The plaster obscured my view and hindered my understanding of the complex interconnected wax system within. After coating the tree,

I left it to dry and cure overnight; then placed the moulds upside down in the steamer and then into the kiln. The melting wax forms establishing the negative space into which the molten flow of bronze would flow, embodying the forms my fingers, the sugar and the wax had created.



Fig. 58 States of Being
The absence, and presence, embodied
in this method of jewellery making
become a material dance between
thresholds of space, time, and states
of matter; a manifestation of the
liminal.



*Fig. 59 Inhabiting
Bodies/Bronze Casts*

On my first attempt, many of the rings remained unformed; their bodies incomplete. The bronze inhabited the accidental crevices and cracks in the investment moulds which I had not planned as dwelling places. Though this outcome was unintentional there was beauty and animacy where the bronze had slowed or followed its own trajectory.

I began to cut the rings from the tree but quickly realised how this act of severing disconnected the conversation. Bennett discusses how Deleuze and Guattari “name metal as the exemplar of a vital materiality; it is metal that best reveals this quivering effervescence; it is metal, bursting with a life, that gives rise to the ‘prodigious idea of Nonorganic Life.’”⁴⁵

45. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 55.





Previous Page Fig. 60 Cosmic Connections
Abstract bodies crafted from lines, that divided and branched. This mobile device had the potential for entanglement; where bodies could join and amalgamate. Branches that affix external bodies are delineations and illustrations of marriage's act of binding bodies and families. Ingold articulates how the lines depicted in genealogical diagrams were "channels down which the dynastic blood would flow, and along them were placed personages represented by miniature portraits, crests or medallions."⁴⁶

Fig. 61 A Slow Sugary Dance
I bound these sugary bodies to the wire structure I had created and hung it outside with the wind; inviting atmosphere to enter the conversation. The outcome was the snippets of sugar drew back on themselves, fusing. Overnight the dew enacted further alchemical transformations melting the sugar which stained the sheet behind it. Their bodies became enmeshed in the sheet like the stains which have entered the mythology of the nuptial bed. The trace of which is, as Gell suggests, like a "magical sign, which refers to, and also alters the world. The phenomenon of magic confronts us with a situation in which matter and meaning become miscible fluids."⁴⁷

46. Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London; New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 110.

47. Alfred Gell, "Magic, Perfume, Dream," in *Symbols and Sentiments: Cross-cultural Studies in Symbolism*, ed. Ioan Lewis (London: Academic Press, 1977), 402.

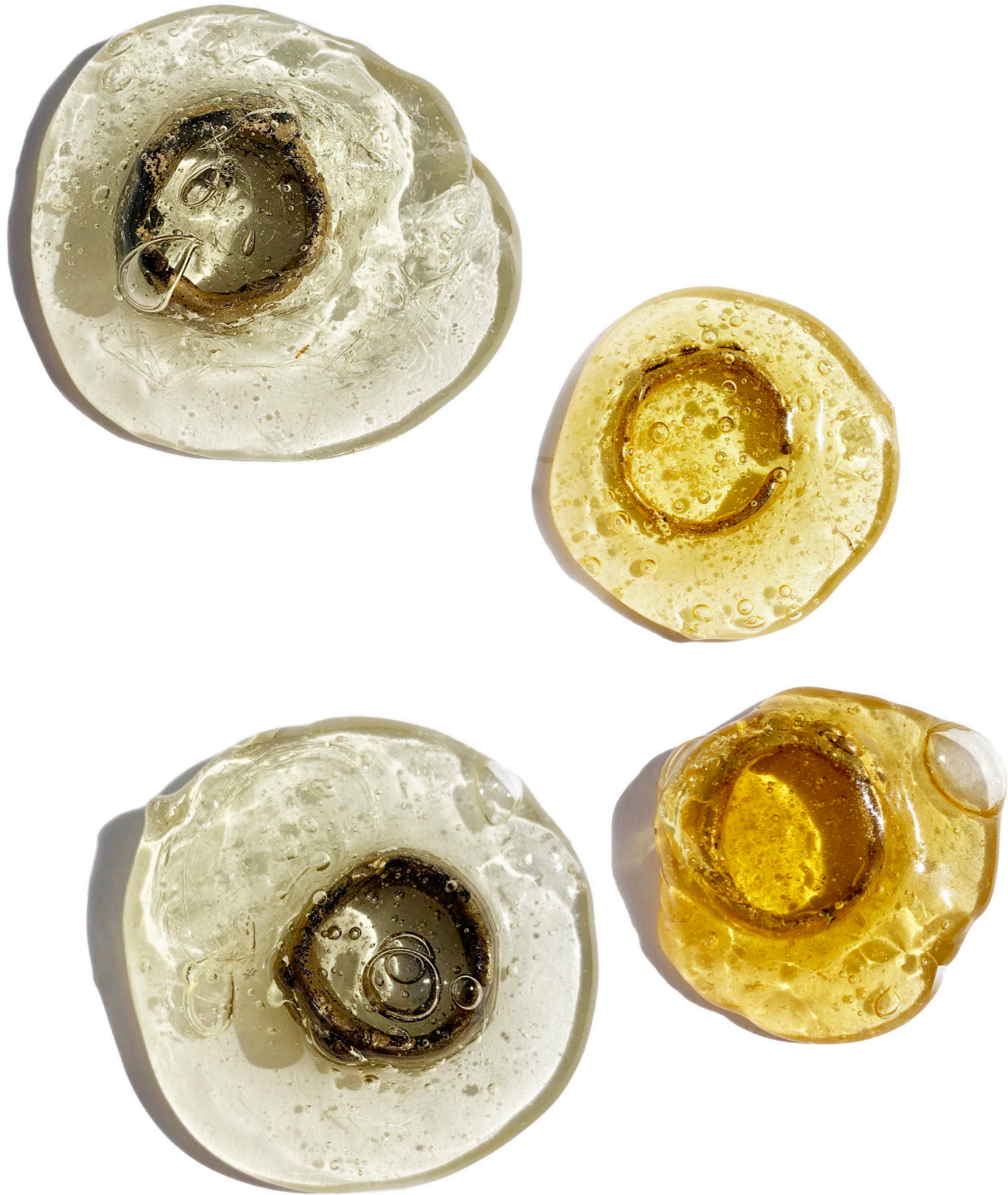


Fig. 62 Downard, Taylor. *Bubbles of Breath*, sugar, bronze rings, 2021.



Fig. 63 Downard, Taylor. *Emerging from the Liminal*, sugar, bronze rings, 2021.



Installation

My installation is composed of three bodies, *Sugar Rings*, *the Veil*, and *Wedding Breakfast*. These ephemeral bodies organize the ritualized space of my installation, adhering to and guiding the subjects that encounter them. These bodies are reimaginings of the ceremonial objects and rituals that bind bodies during the Greek Orthodox Wedding. Within the fluidic and sticky cosmos of my installation foreign bodies (subjects and objects) become bound, married in sticky harmony.



Fig. 65 Downard, Taylor. *Performed Body*, drawing, sugar, bronze, 2022.

Sugar Rings

The performing bodies of the tethered sugar rings speak to the tension and spatial relations between subjects and things. This work is composed of nine bronze cast sugar rings resting on small steel brackets drawn out from the gallery wall. Cotton threads expand between and bind the rings to an additional bronze ring submerged in a sugary milieu. Embodying the sacraments of Greek Orthodox weddings, I tied the rings in a manner I conceived as ritualised. Using a series of circular and looping gestures, I knotted the thread around the rings three times.

My aim was to create a social space for subjects and objects to haptically engage. I invite you to interact with the objects, to try on and adorn, to inhabit each other. In this intimate engagement, the sugar's shadows dance, flowing in sync with the movement of the wearer. The weight of the object's body and its material force is felt on the subject's finger upon wearing. The tethered rings/intertwined bodies are evocative of becoming one, reinforcing the tension between self and the state induced by being joined.

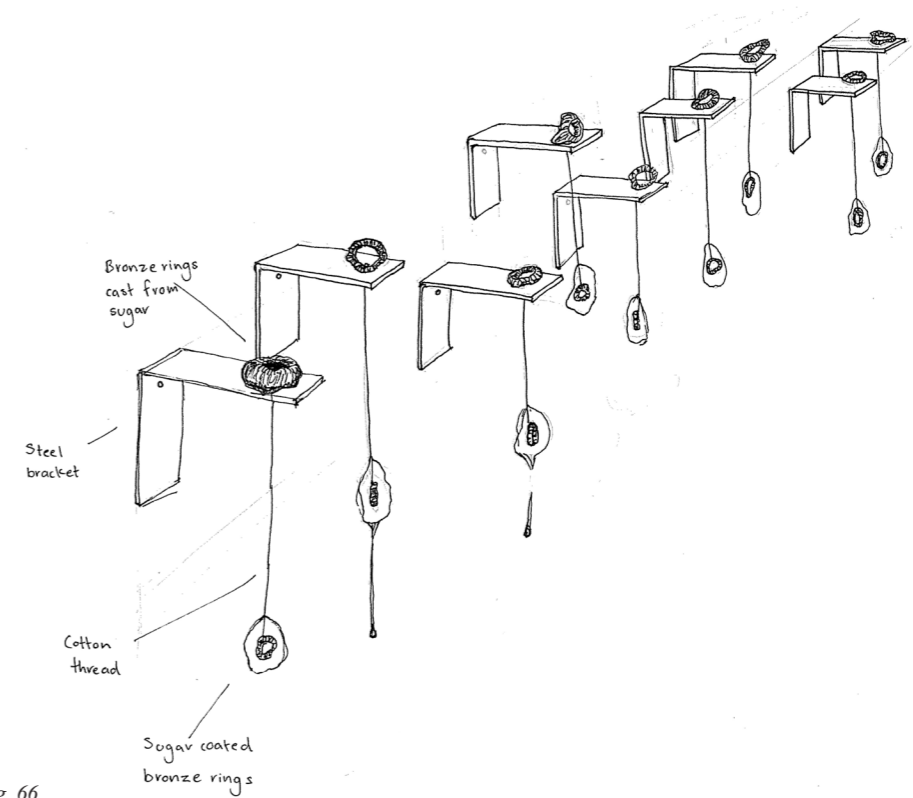


Fig. 66

Fig. 66 Downard, Taylor. *Performed Body Installation Sketch*, drawing, 2022.



Fig. 67 Downard, Taylor. *Veil*, sugar, bronze rings, cotton candle wick, 2022.

Veil

I bound these two suspended sugar bodies using the same ritualised motions. Though this time, candlewick fixes the ringed bodies and the caramelised sugar submerges my bronze rings in its sticky sphere. These sugary worlds hang counter-balanced between pulleys that respond to the rate of melting performed by the bodies. Conceived as a ceremony, the delicate balance of the objects belongs to the spatio-temporal dimension of the marriage, an oscillating performance unfolding through space and time. In its performance of dissolution, the mimetic language of the sugar manifests in writing upon the gallery floors; a sugary scripture communicates, the two bodies writing love letters to one another. Projecting light emanates the ethereal bodies of the sugar, which temporarily taint the white gallery walls. This ambient light is a rendering of the celestial cosmos. Through light sugars, anima is made tangible and relational. The unravelling and jewel-like bodies of sugar, folding and intertwining, perform as mimetic writing, speaking to the unbecoming and being one.

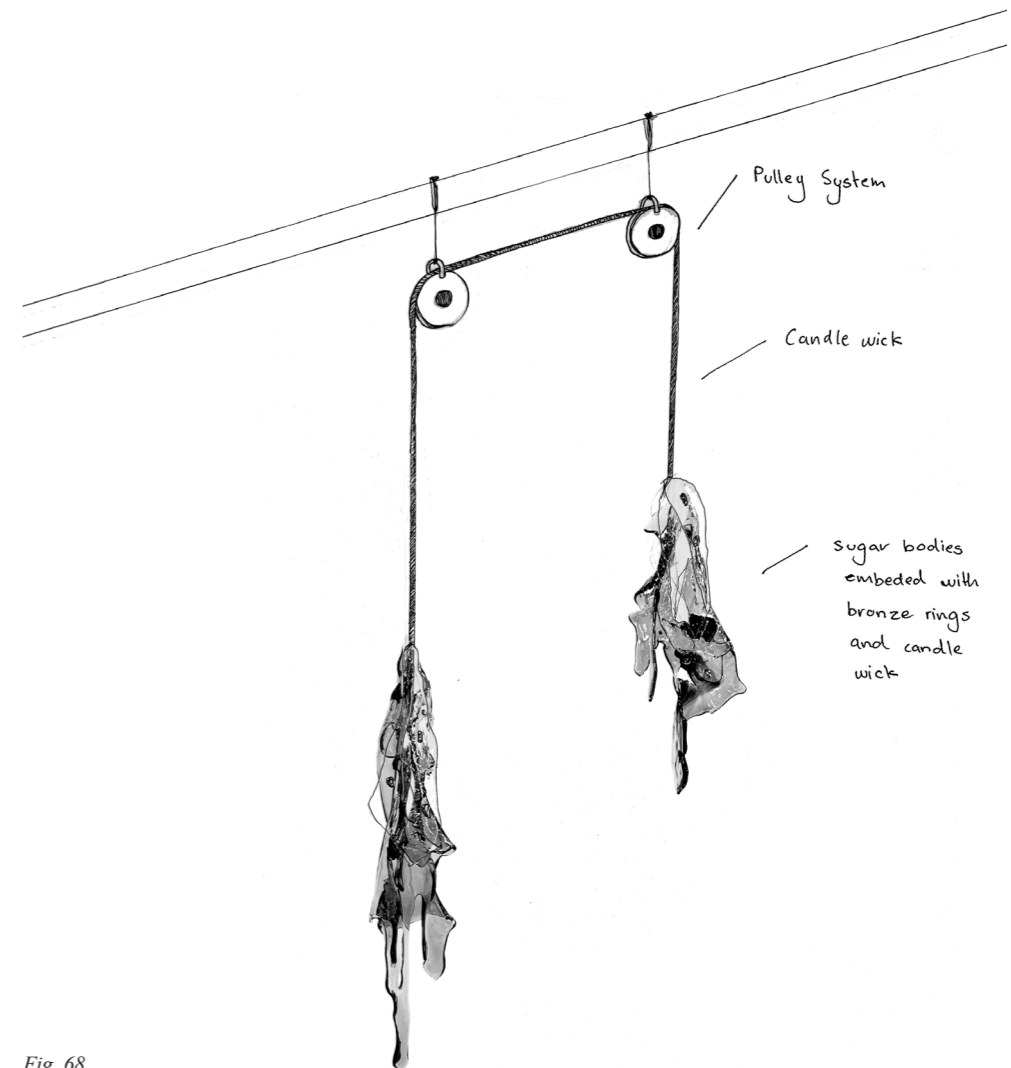


Fig. 68

Fig. 68 Downard, Taylor, *Veil Sketch*, sugar, bronze rings, cotton candle wick, 2022.



Fig. 69 Downard, Taylor, *Wedding Breakfast*, sugar, bronze ring tree, 2022.

Wedding Breakfast

After casting, I glazed the bronze ring tree with liquefied sugar. These bejewelled trees are totems, symbolising the fluidic transformation and social agency of sugar, wax and bronze. In this installation, the sugar denotes the dissolution of self the bride experiences during the wedding ceremony. The ring tree embodies the genealogical tree whose stems and branches bear fruit after the consummation of the marriage. These totems sit on a table, signifying the wedding breakfast, where the observers can consume the objects through sensory inhalations.

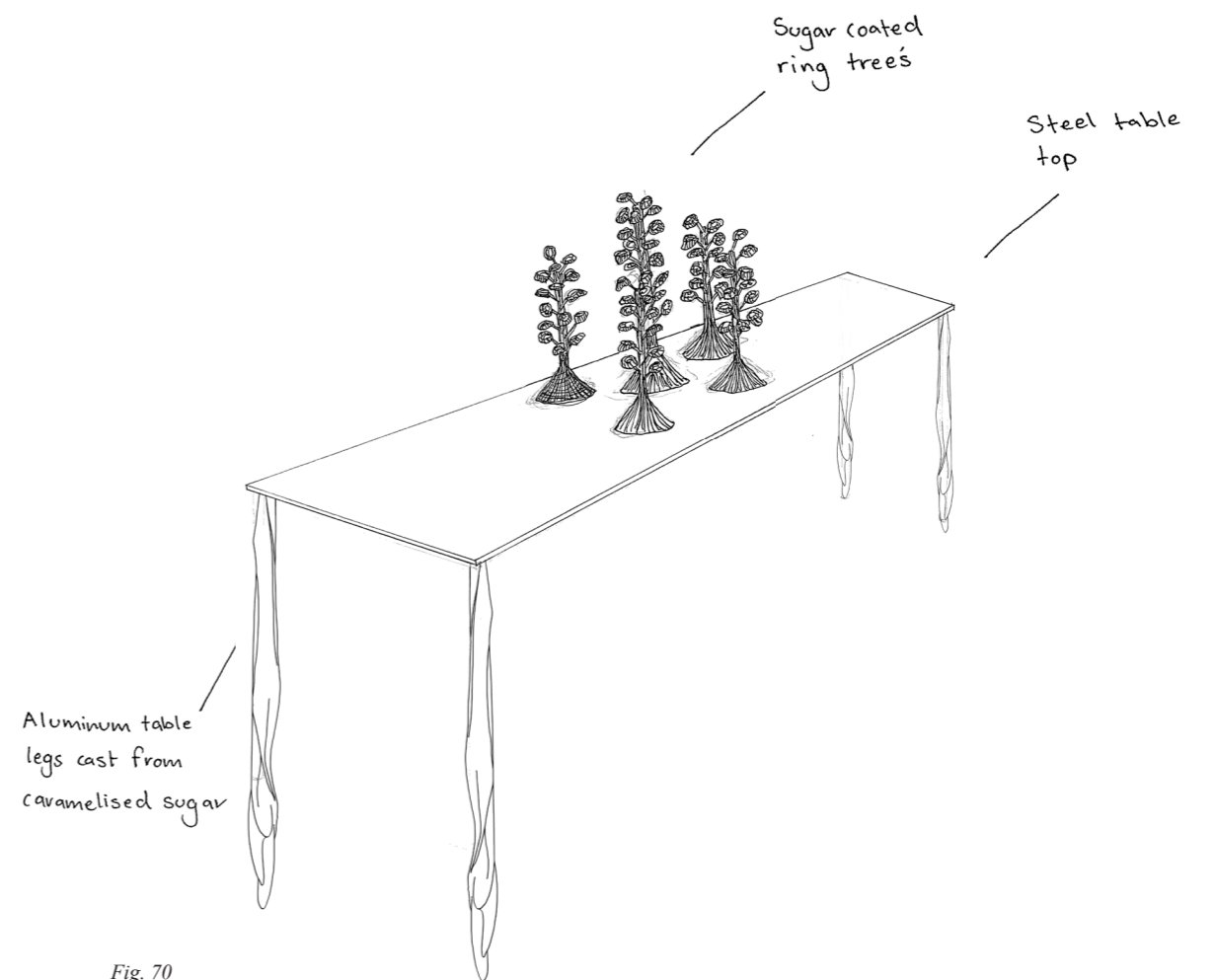


Fig. 70

Fig. 70 Downard, Taylor, *Wedding Breakfast Installation Sketch*, drawing, 2022.



Fig. 71 Downard, Taylor, *Illuminated Body One*, sugar, bronze ring tree, light, 2022.



Fig. 72 Downard, Taylor, *Illuminated Body Two*, sugar, bronze ring tree, light, 2022.



Fig. 73 Downard, Taylor, *Ring Tree Projections*, sugar, bronze, light, 2022.

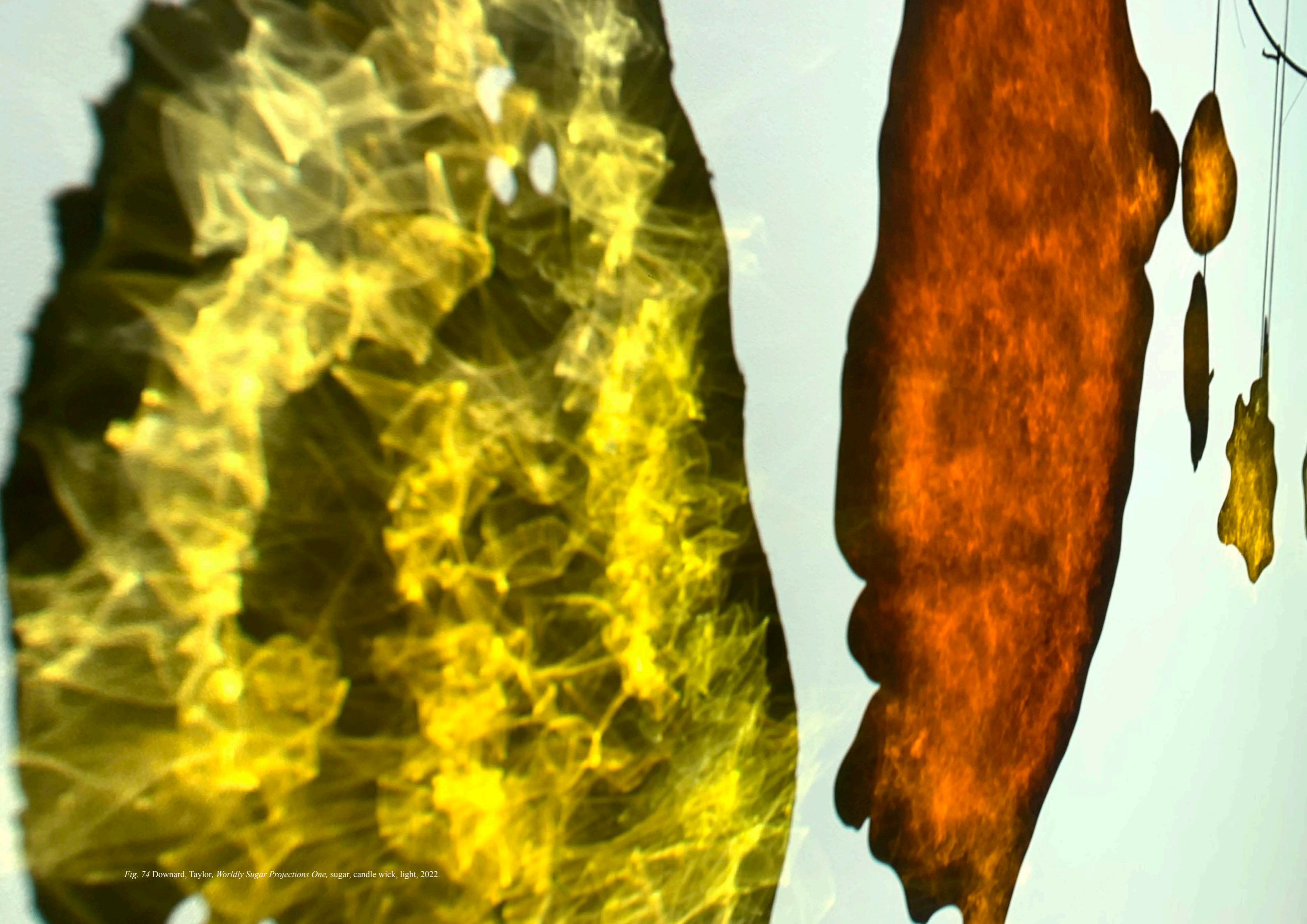


Fig. 74 Downard, Taylor, *Worldly Sugar Projections One*, sugar, candle wick, light, 2022.



Fig. 75 Downard, Taylor, *Worldly Sugar Projections Two*, sugar, candle wick, light, 2022.

Conclusion: The Circularity of Stickiness, reflections on being an Animist Designer

Aroused by the wedding ring's *contagious affect*, my material imaginary became fascinated by the syrupy revolving cosmos of ritualised space, reconnecting me to the animist knowledge inherent in Greek Orthodox wedding sacraments and the beliefs of my Ancient Greek ancestors.

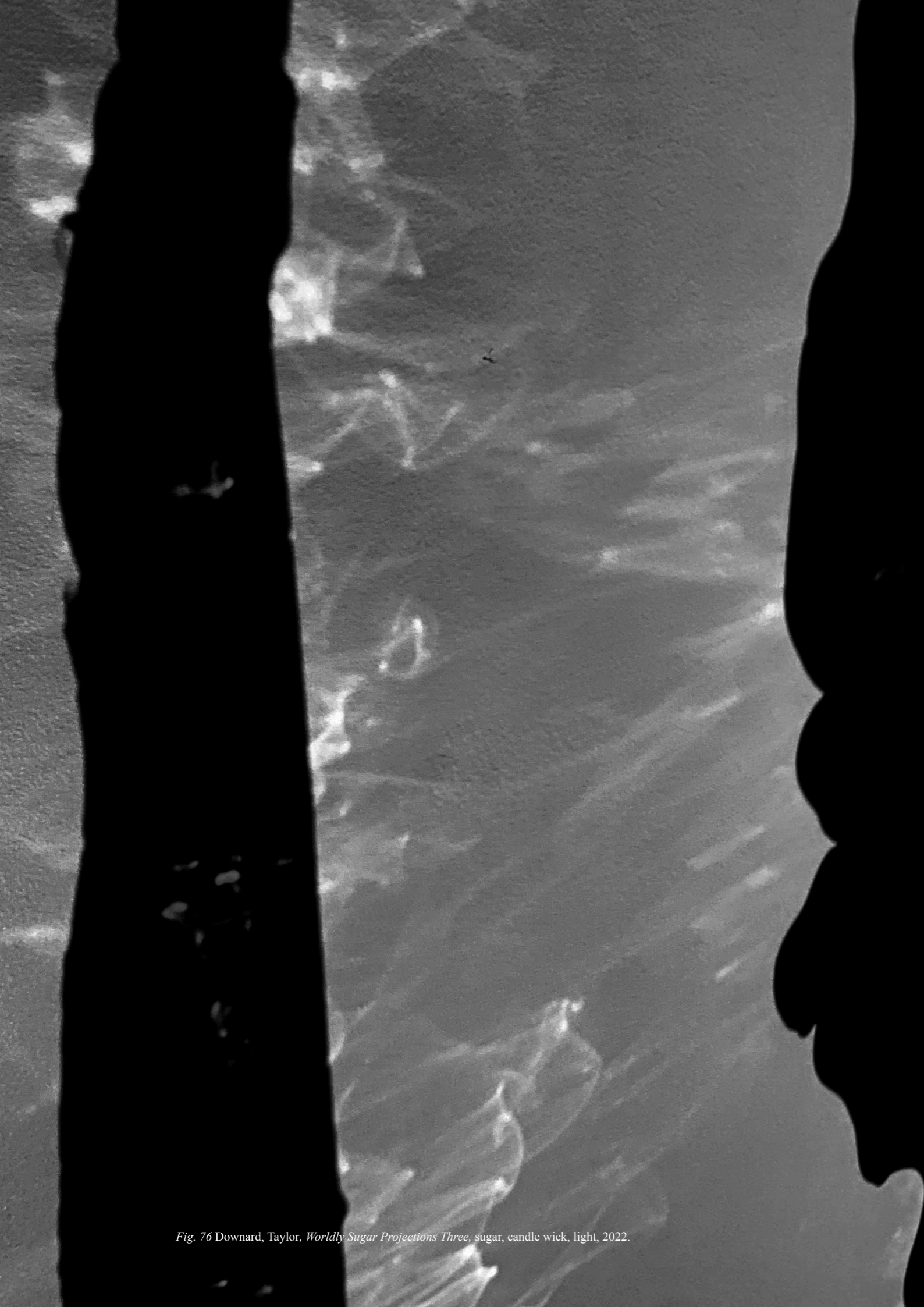
With a neo-animistic understanding of materials used in matrimonial jewellery, how can the design of ceremonial objects create sensory encounters that connect the object|entity to the subjects, changing their perception of the world?

Gell talks about the connections between object bodies and human bodies as *forming social relations with things*.⁴⁸ Sugar allowed me to materialise subject-object-relations, which they performed through their tactility, smell and taste. Sugar adheres and clings, mimicking the shape of the subject's body, creating a lingering residue, imprinting them within a material imaginary.

The caramelisation of sugar enabled me to craft rings to evoke bodily and spiritual bonds. Heat became a vital and fundamental ritual within my practice. It awakened sugar, wax and metals from their sound slumber. I have witnessed sugar's voice awaken as it simmered and bubbled, swelling with breath. Transforming in alchemical and sensory ways, each grain of sugar dissolved into a singular being, rearranging its matter. Its original brown colour rematerialised in an echo of its inner self. Sugar and I became partners through heat.

In this material enquiry, I have viewed space through the commingled sites of the wedding ring and marriage ceremony. This work stretches between and adjoins intimate and public spaces. The installation unfolds within this liminal and sticky expanse. My practice has engaged in binding, heating, and the repetition of annular gestures, much like the symbolic performance of a Greek Orthodox wedding. The three bodies of work presented in this installation are ritualised evocations of the ceremony, the milieu surrounding it, and the subjects involved. The objects, spatialised in this way, create an interstice where foreign bodies can enter and adhere to one another. The installation offers an experience of the *contagious affect* created by bronze and sugar. I felt the intimate/micro-moments of making the bronze jewellery, recognising the ring tree's totemic presence, and entering the poetic and ephemeral body of sugar capturing me; in this sticky state of cohesion, I have developed an animist worldview.

⁴⁸. Gell, *Art and Agency*, 18.



The temporal dimensions of my installation unfold sugar, wax and metal's elemental narratives. Sugar acts as a fluidic skin revealing my three bodies of work as constantly in flux, always with the capacity to transform. Mark making, staining, and dissolution perform sugar and bronzes animate abilities and materialise their social encounters. The liquid state of sugar unfurls during the installation until it puddles on the floor. Gravity, humidity and aging pull the sugar bodies downwards and outward. This liquidation speaks to the dissolution of self through marriage, bodies joining as one (subjects and objects within the installation) like the puddle on the floor and the fluidic and flowing matter within all material bodies (subjects and objects). While the fleetingness of the sugar's brilliance, jewel tones, and reflective and projective light are momentary, their preciousness is subject to time, a homage to Miss Havisham and the social and political complexities of traditional conceptions of marriage and the burden of the bride.

As an animist designer, my enquiry is forever sticky, unfolding and revolving. Through this personal journey of becoming a neo-animist designer, I have reconnected with my culture's ancient knowledge of material personhood. My spatial design practice has shifted, attending to and being guided by materials *anima, breath, spirit, and life*.

Final Installation



Fig. 77 Downard, Taylor, *Sticky Correspondence Installation: The veil and the sugar rings*, sugar, cotton, bronze, 2022. Photo credit: Lula Cucchiara.



Fig. 78 Downard, Taylor, *Sticky Correspondence Installation: wedding breakfast*, sugar, bronze, 2022. Photo credit: Lula Cucchiara.



Fig. 79 Downard, Taylor, *Sticky Correspondence Installation: sugar rings*, bronze, sugar, cotton, 2022. Photo credit: Emily Parr.



Fig. 80 Downard, Taylor, *Sticky Correspondence Installation: veil, sugar, bronze, cotton*, 2022. Photo credit: Lula Cucchiara.



Previous Page Fig. 81 Downard, Taylor, *Sticky Correspondence Installation: veil dripping*, sugar, bronze, cotton, 2022. Photo credit: Lula Cucchiara.
Fig. 82 Downard, Taylor, *Sticky Correspondence Installation: sugar rings*, bronze, sugar, cotton, 2022. Photo credit: Lula Cucchiara.



Fig. 83 Downard, Taylor, *Sticky Correspondence Installation: veil audience interaction*, bronze, sugar, cotton, 2022. Photo credit: Lula Cucchiara.



Fig. 84 Downard, Taylor, *Sticky Correspondence Installation: sugar ring audience interaction*, bronze, sugar, cotton, 2022.



Fig. 85 Downard, Taylor, *Sticky Correspondence Installation*, bronze, sugar, cotton, 2022.

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