shapeshifter

A paper in support of the thesis exhibition:

ankle biter, bean counter, fender bender

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

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healed fissures

September 16, 2006: *Early this morning a 19-year-old Canadian citizen was reported missing on Vesterås mountain, in Geiranger, Norway. Local police worked with a group of volunteers to search the area on foot, while an emergency call was made to SAR and police service helicopters, nationally. Police helicopter LN-OCP was the first to arrive. They located the missing person, unconscious and in critical condition, at the bottom of a cliff near Storsæter. The LN-OCP helicopter was unable to land, but left one officer in place to assess the young person's condition. An Mk.43B Sea King helicopter, operated by the Royal Norwegian Air Force search-and-rescue squadron, arrived shortly afterwards and has since transported the 19-year-old to the Ålesund hospital where they are undergoing emergency surgery. They are being treated for hypothermia, brain injury, major blood-loss, punctured and collapsed lungs, shattered bones and other internal injuries, and they remain in critical condition.*

The victim had notified friends and coworkers that they were leaving to go hiking on Vesterås mountain yesterday morning, and the alarm was sounded when they failed to report to work early today. Their injuries are consistent with having slipped, slid and fallen down a steep section of mountain. Local police officer Johan Arnt Overøye estimates they fell fifteen meters from the nearest section of trail. Overøye also indicated that he has seen many hiking accidents in these mountains, and not one of the missing persons has ever been found alive.

Although the victim is a Canadian national whose first language is English, LN-OCP's attending officer noted that when they first regained consciousness, they spoke to him in Norwegian, in the local Møre og Romsdal dialect.

Half my blood was lost, leaked out on the side of the mountain, and in exchange the mountain left parts of itself inside me: small fragments of moss and stone. Over the course of hours and days, many peoples' hands crossed the skin threshold of my body: cutting and cleaning and sewing and scanning, picking their way through the rocks and other debris. Their machines whirred, humming and beeping, pulsing. They rolled my body across the floor.

For many days my thought-self (*hugr*) hung suspended, unbounded, while my body-self (*hamr*) lay swollen full of water, machine-breathing, peeing through a tube and shitting into a pan.[1] As time passed my *hugr* and *hamr* were re-joined. My bones grew back together, but different. Now when I go walking out under the sky, my face leaks tears. When I'm sleeping, spit drips along healed fissures. Half my blood was replaced.

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[1] In pre-Christian norse cosmology *hugr* and *hamr*, the thought-self and the body-self, are two of the four parts of the self. The remaining two parts are *fylgja* and *hamingja*, a person's attendant spirit and a person's luck. All four are viewed as intrinsic parts of a fluid and shifting self.

Fig. 1. Digital photograph taken September 21, 2006, labelled “Hun krøp denne avstanden etter fallet” [She crawled this distance after the fall]. (Hans Jørgen Tuft)

Fig. 2. Digital photograph taken September 21, 2006, labelled “sophia fall site.” (Hans Jørgen Tuft)

book stain

I'm reading a paperback copy of the Poetic Edda[2], and noticing a light brown stain all along the bottom righthand corner of the book. The stain is widest at the front and narrowest at the back, and it disappears almost entirely on page 235, at the start of *Svipdagsmol,* ten pages from the book's back cover. In the end all that's left is a slight warbling, a waviness in the paper, the faintest memory of moisture.

I wonder if the stain comes from tea or maybe coffee spilled in the bottom of somebody's bag. It's colour is darkest around the edges, fading to a pale grey-brown towards the centre. I flip the pages back and forth and watch the stain-shape grow and shrink. It makes an accidental animation that reminds me of tides: bodies ebbing and flowing, waxing and waning, water bodies and moon-rock bodies, celestial bodies tied to our own.

The book is a Dover Edition from 2004. Editors have cut away much of Henry Adams Bellows' original notes and translations from 1923, making this version of the Edda the same size as a paperback novel. It's easy to hold in one hand. The word "interpolated" comes up a lot

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[2] The Poetic Edda, sometimes called the Elder Edda, is a collection of mythological and heroic poems, written and transcribed by unknown authors. The most complete surviving manuscript is the *Codex Regius*, compiled in Iceland in the early thirteenth-century, at about the same time that the Prose Edda – also called the Younger Edda – was written. Though the etymology of the word 'edda' is unclear, its occurrence in later Icelandic texts is thought to mean 'poetics'.

Eddic poems are typically written in *fornyrðislag* 'old lore' metre, with dialogue written in *ljóðaháttr* 'chant' metre. In *fornyrðislag* half-lines are grouped into pairs (bound by alliteration) to create long-lines, and four long-lines typically make up each stanza.

in the footnotes, defined as: *to make insertions; to alter or corrupt (something, such as a text) by inserting new or foreign matter.*[3] There are many lines and stanzas, and even whole sections of text that are thought to be interpolations – varied additions and annotations. Other sections of the poems are partially decayed or missing in places where the vellum or the paper they were written on has quite literally rotted away.

Bellows continuously draws comparisons between different versions of the texts, travelling back and forth across his different sources. He cites the forty-three vellum pages of the *Codex Regis* (c. 1270), the two-hundred-twenty-five illustrated vellum leaves of the *Flateyjarbók* (Book of the Flat Island, c. 1390), *Hauksbók* (Book of Haukr, c. 1310), the seven surviving manuscripts of Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*[4] (c. 1300–1600), and Árni Magnússon's codex, compiled throughout his lifetime (1663–1730), among others. The first transcriptions of these oral stories have disappeared entirely. Everything that remains has been patched up and re-worked over many centuries. Like garments, these texts have been altered to hang from the body differently. In this way Bellows' translations appear to me as a fabric. The songs and stories occur in their shimmering absences as much as in their moments of presence.

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[3] "Interpolate," Merriam-Webster dictionary, accessed January 31, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interpolate.

[4] Written at a time when new forms of poetic expression were arriving in Iceland and Norway from continental Europe, the Prose Edda is a handbook of sorts, breaking down the structure and conventions of older, traditional forms of verse and storytelling. Though it quotes heavily from the Poetic Edda – citing poetic verses as sources – it is written in a straightforward prose. The text is attributed to Snorri Sturluson, an Icelandic law-speaker, scholar and poet who was assassinated in 1241.

salt tears

I'm walking up the hill to school and my left eye is leaking again. It's streaking salt tears down that side of my face. Usually it starts as I'm crossing the bridge over the river, especially in winter, but it happens in the summer too. It depends on the direction of the wind.

After my fall on the mountain, they told my mother that I would probably lose this eye, my left eye, making me the mirror-image of Odin.[5] "There might not be any way of saving it," they said. But here it is, safely nestled inside my skull, looking outwards and leaking.

My shoulders ache, and when I blow my nose I get snot all over my hands anyway. The tissue didn't help. I'm crying again and I'm confused and afraid of what painful words or thoughts might come leaking out of me when I start writing. I'm feeling homesick and sick from home and I'm afraid that my mind is unravelling, or rather, that it's splitting apart into many sharp pieces. What happens when I can't put the pieces back together anymore? Everything is happening all around me, arriving as headlines, but I feel suspended, floating, like I'm living in a void.

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[5] Odin traded his right eye for a single drink from *Mímisbrunnr*, a well of wisdom guarded by the giant and water spirit Mímr. *Mímisbrunnr* sits beneath one of the roots of the world tree *Yggdrasil*, and in drinking from it Odin gained knowledge of the runes and their magic. Many of these spells are known only to Odin and not practiced by anyone else.

I think about Authumla, the cow at the beginning of the world. Standing in the cold and the fog of the pre-world she licks the salt from frost-covered stones for nourishment. Her companion, an intersex giant named Ymir, drinks the milk flowing in four streams from her teats. Both Authumla and Ymir were born from hoar frost that formed in the primordial gap between the fire and the ice worlds, *Niflheim* and *Muspell*. While Ymir sleeps, a man and a woman giant are born from the perspiration under Ymir's left arm, and during the night one of their feet begets a son with the other foot. Authumla's endless salt-licking wears away the surface of the frost-covered stones, and first the hair and then the whole head of a man appear. Her tongue eventually loosens the rest of his body, freeing his limbs from the rock.

These are the first of the gods and the giants, and they continue to proliferate. Bestla, a giantess descended of those giants born from Ymir's sweat, is married to Bor, a descendant of the man birthed from Authumla's frost-covered stone. Together, Bestla and Bor bear three sons: the god Odin and his brothers Vili and Ve. As they grew older, these three gods grow restless. They cast Ymir as a threat and so they decide to kill them. They cut Ymir's throat and this outpouring of the blood becomes the salt water of oceans. Ymir's flesh becomes the soil, their bones the mountains, their hair the plants and the trees. From their brain "the forbidding clouds."[6]

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[6] Karl Mortensen, *A Handbook of Norse Mythology* (New York: Dover Editions, 2003), 22.

In Volva's prophecy in *Voluspo*, she describes the ground grown green with leeks at the beginning of the world:

> The sun from the south warmed the stones of the earth,
>
> And green was the ground with growing leeks.[7]

[7] "Voluspo," in *The Poetic Edda: The Mythological Poems*, trans. Henry Adam Bellows (New York: Dover Editions, 2004), 4.

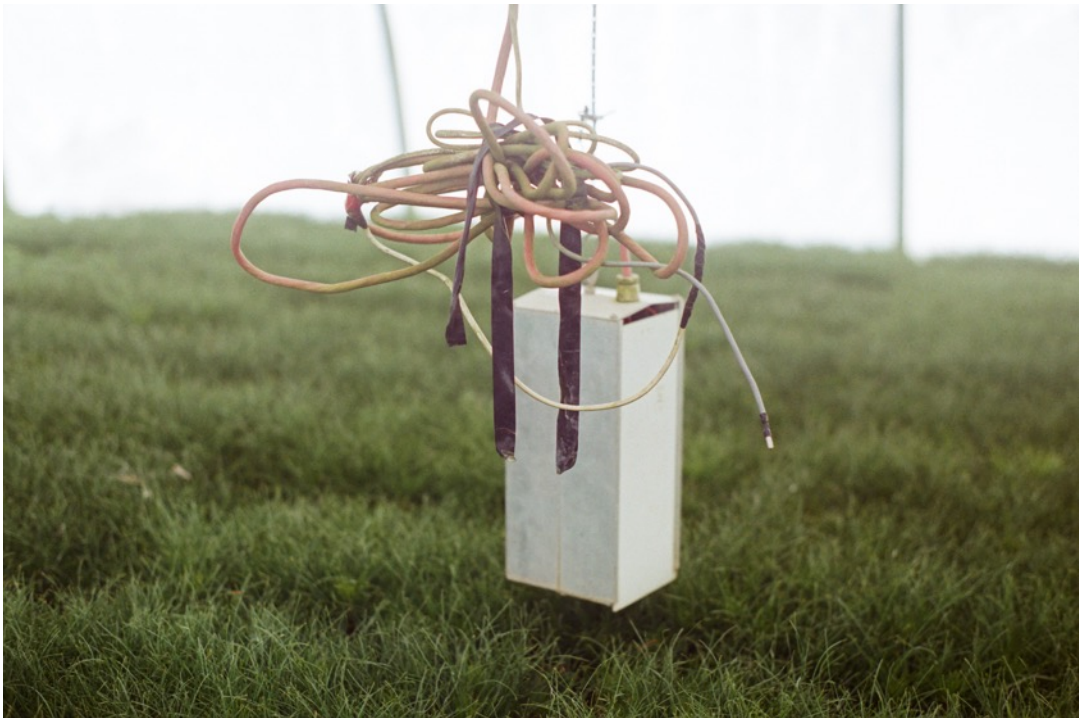

Fig 3. A sprinkler hanging over a table covered in seedlings. PRT Nursery, Dryden, ON. November 2016. Digital scan of 35mm film photograph.

Fig 4. A half-disassembled provisional work table covered in styrofoam trays filled with seedlings. PRT Nursery, Dryden, ON. November 2016. Digital scan of 35mm film photograph.

sapling seedling

I'm visiting my cousin Leslie at the tree nursery where she works, a short drive off the long, dark line of highway that cuts right through the middle of town. We crunch our way across the snow, walking past rows of quonset-hut-like greenhouses, their peaked domes stretched with clear plastic sheeting in place of a quonset hut's half-circle of corrugated steel. Each greenhouse is filled with rows of provisional worktables: metal beams resting on stacks of cinderblocks. Each worktable is filled with seedlings growing in gridded, styrofoam trays, rooted in small plugs of soil.

In the nursery's office, which sits just off the packing room floor, there's a mini fridge full of tree seeds and my cousin explains how the seeds need to believe that the conditions are going to be good for growing before they'll germinate: first they have to believe that it's winter, and then they have to believe that it's spring. Moist, cold conditions are used to break seed dormancy – awakening them from their seed sleep – and inside each tiny seed that's waking up there are many minute strata. These include a protective seed coat (testa), nutritive tissue (endosperm), an embryonic leaf or leaves (cotyledon), and an embryonic root (radicle). [8]

Once the saplings leave the nursery, wrapped in plastic and packed into boxes, they are shipped out across the continent, filling orders from reforestation projects in parks and on

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[8] Leónie Bentsinka and Maarten Koornneef. "Seed Dormancy and Germination," *The Arabidopsis Book* 6 (2008): e0119.

clearcuts. The minimum order is ten thousand seedlings, and the workers who wrap the tree roots get paid piece work, per tree.

When they're planted and grown, the tree-bodies settle out into new sets of strata: the heartwood and the sapwood are called xylem, a tissue that conducts water and dissolved minerals collected by the roots, and the inner and the outer bark are called phloem, a tissue that conducts the food photosynthesized by the tree's leaves. Information runs up and down the tree, travelling in these vascular bundles,[9] and in between the outer and the inner layers there is a slimy process of cell division happening through the spring and the summer months – a loosening the bond between the bark and the wood of the tree that happens cyclically.

Cut down and re-formed as lumber, the tree fibres continue to absorb and release moisture, pushing and pulling, moved by the heat and the cold. Wood taken from different parts of the tree-body has different softness, hardness, humidity, density, and the oldest part of the tree is where the wood is the most brittle.[10]

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[9] "Angiosperm: Organization of the vascular tissue," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed April 4, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/plant/angiosperm/Process-of-xylem-transport.

[10] Everett Ellenwood, "Anatomy of Wood," *Woodcarving Illustrated*, Fox Chapel Publishing, September 18, 2017, http://woodcarvingillustrated.com/blog/2017/09/18/anatomy-of-wood/.

wood woven

A structure built from salvaged two-by-fours stands perpendicular to the gallery wall. In the corner where it meets the wall, it fits snugly underneath a small overhang, wedged in place with wooden shims. Though similar to the two-by-four framing found underneath the gallery's drywall, this rectangular sculpture is 'skinned' with other materials: plaster seeps through angled slats of lath, creased scraps of kraft paper are fastened to the wood with small nails, and a crumpled sheet of blanket-stitched plastic billows outward, hanging from a horizontal dowel. The wood is joined with dowels rather than screws, and in many place it's wall-like bones are laid bare, left uncovered – leaving large gaps. The exterior surfaces of the two-by-fours are rough – left untouched and untreated – while the interior surfaces have been cut and sanded smooth, revealing the knots and delicate woodgrain of the lumber.

The structure has four vertical beams placed at regular intervals, creating five sections. Two horizontal crossbeams cut through each section, playing out a rhythm – up, down, up, down, up. Glass jars hang down from the crossbeams, recalling pickle and jam jars filled with screws, nails, washers, wood stain and solvents – a sorting structure used in basement workshops, barns and backyard sheds. The lath is made from scrap two-by-fours and two-by twos, cut down into thin strips, and it bears all the marks of the wood's past use: paint, dirt, weathering, and the small black stains left where nails have been pulled out. Across most of the sculpture's surface the slats are angled at forty-five degrees – making a chevron pattern, a herringbone weave.

The angled lath pulls the woodgrain in opposing directions, and holds everything more firmly in place. Still the lumber twists and warps in the humid summer heat. Where the dowels once sat flush against the surface of the wood, they now protrude or pucker inwards. Having more weight pressing down would certainly help, but in the space above the structure there is only dust and light and air – almost invisible.

Fig 5. “wood wove” installed at the plumb for the group exhibition *grass taps*, August 2021. (Alison Postma)

tooth pulp

Leslie and I drive out behind the pulp mill to watch the chip trucks unloading. The semi-trailers come in off the logging roads, filled to the brim with chipped up trees. The drivers get out of their cabs and lock their rigs to the platform. The platform raises the trucks up, slowly, until they form an almost-ninety-degree angle with the ground. The wood chips that fall out are moved by conveyer belts, and spit back out a second time, forming huge, towering piles.

On our way home, my cousin points out a large settling pond that processes the mill's wastewater, or *effluent*. The pond sits opposite the towering piles of wood chips, on the other side of the road, and it's difficult to see as you drive past because its outer edges have been carefully lined with decorative trees. As seen through the screen of trees, the pond's motorized aerators are easily mistaken for ornamental fountains.

As Bragi and Ægir discuss in *Skaldskaparmal* – Snorri Sturluson's twelfth-century treatise on the conventions of skaldic poetry[11] – the craft of poetry is not singularly about truth or beauty, it is also a way to "conceal [something] in a secret language" through ornament.[12]

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[11] In old norse the word 'skald' means poet, and skaldic poetry is one of two poetic forms used in old norse literature – the other being eddic poetry. Skaldic poems are generally attributed to a particular author and circumstance. Structurally they are composed in *dróttkvætt* 'court poetry' metre, and they make use of complex poetic substitutions, including *heiti* (synonyms) and kennings (compound phrases used in place of nouns).

[12] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda,* trans. Anthony Faulks (New York: David Campbell Publishers, 1987), 61.

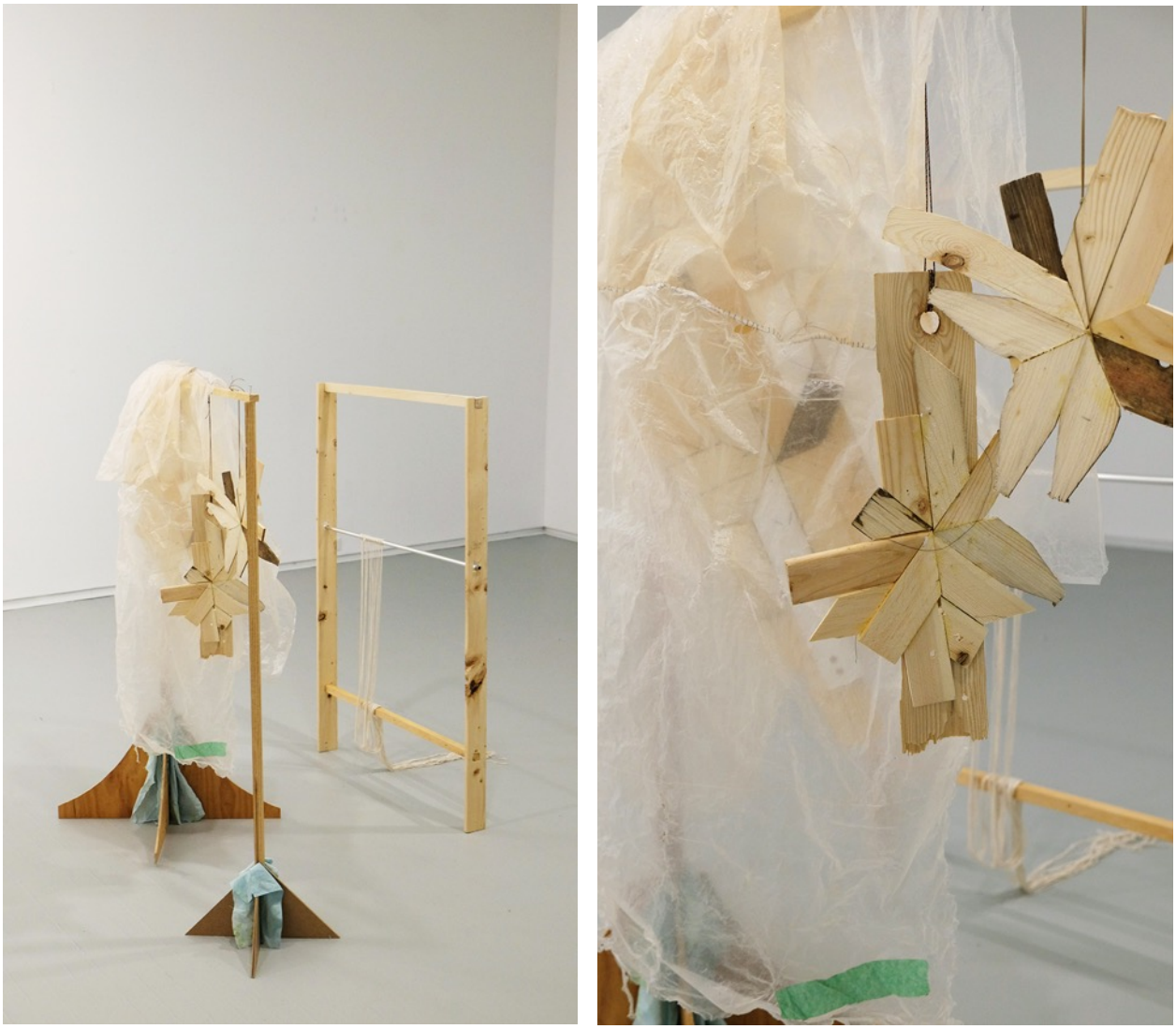

Fig 6. “three times burned and three times born”[13] installed at Zavitz Gallery, December 2021.

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[13] This title comes from a passage of Voluspo in the Poetic Edda, describing Freyja’s repeated re-birth during the war between the two houses of gods – the Vanir and the Æsir:

> The war I remember, the first in the world,
> When the gods with spears had smitten Gollveig [Freyja],
> And in the hall of Hor had burned her, —
> Three times burned, and three times born,
> Oft and again, yet ever she lives.

hanged[14] **charmed**

Three wooden charms hang from a provisional two-legged structure. One of the charms is almost entirely obscured by a crumpled piece of clear plastic, cloudy with clay residue. The piece of plastic is in fact many small pieces sewn together, their suture-like stitches articulated in a dark thread. A piece of green painter's tape clings to the bottom edge of the plastic, and the structure's awkward, triangular feet are shimmed in place with scraps of a threadbare floral bed sheet, dyed a faint emerald green.

A second structure mirrors the first, standing slightly off-centre but parallel. Both are rectilinear, precariously balanced, and cobbled together from sticks of scrap plywood and lumber, slightly varied in their dark and light shades of yellow or reddish brown. The second structure has no feet. It stands with the bottom of its legs flush to the ground, and it leans to one side slightly, bearing a third crossbeam made from a piece of aluminum pipe. Cotton kitchen twine hangs from the pipe in long strands, falling across the floor like hair, dragged down in straight lines, resembling a weaving's warp, but loosened and unfixed, waiting, unweighted.

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[14] In pursuit of wisdom, Odin hanged himself from the world tree for nine nights, naked, wounded, and without food or drink. In direct reference to this, the tree's name Yggdrasil, means Odin's (Ygg) gallows (drasil).

Ygg is one of more than two-hundred different names used for Odin, found scattered throughout the surviving corpus of old norse poetry and prose. Each of the different names speaks to different aspects of the god's character, and the name Ygg in particular means *the terrible one*. His other names range from Mighty One, Much-Wise, True One and Beloved, to Killer, Screamer, Inciter-Weaver, Evil-Doer, Changeable, and Lord of Ghosts.

The charms themselves are made from thin strips of scrap wood, bearing the scars of their previous use. They form shapes reminiscent of a star quilt, also similar to the *selburose*[15] pattern used in Norwegian knitting.

klemt mellom[16]

Large, blanket-like panels of brown kraft paper are layered between semi-translucent snapshots and pressed up against the wall with long sticks of lumber. Each stick has been rounded at one end, forming the shape of a boat's oar handle, a phallus, or the tip of a finger, pointing. These rounded ends are roughly hewn, and they've been dipped in a yellow fabric dye before being coated in beeswax. The unrounded end of each stick makes contact with the floor at an improvised angle. A loop of nylon cord runs through a hole drilled in the square end of each stick, as if they were meant to be hung up from nails or hooks on the wall, like tools.

The photos are film snapshots of snow and sunsets and plants and non-human animals, culled from an amorphous archive of images taken in and around the house that my grandparents built in rural Northwestern Ontario, on a wooded piece of land covered with spruce and pine trees growing in sandy soil. The snapshots have been scanned and printed out in large, long strips

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[15] Though the *selburose* shape doesn't originate in Norway, it was popularized as a knitting pattern in 1857 by the teenage Marit Gulsethbrua Emstad, who took inspiration from older knitting patterns. Described as a star, a snowflake, or an eight-petal rose, the shape is thought to have its earliest origins in patterns found in Coptic and Byzantine art. It's also seen in weaving, embroidery, and mosaic work, including in the *Qamar Beit Lahem* motif used in Palestinian tatreez.

[16] This translates from Norwegian as: held or hugged between.

of semi-translucent paper, and these sections are sewn together by hand, imperfectly. There are glimpses of grass and flowers, birds and snow banks, cats and tree lines and several feet of snow covering everything around the house. In small sections, the photos have been painted into with gesso, and following the lines of certain edges they have been cut into parts.

The kraft paper panels are made up of smaller rectangles of unfolded brown paper bags and packing material, machine-sewn together, zig zag stitched. They still hold the residual folds of previous use, and when placed side by side, the slight variations in hue are made visible. At the beginnings and the ends of each stitch, the threads hang loose, whispering their own unravelling.

Like a tapestry, decorating and insulating the wall, softening it, clothing the body of the room. Like the layers of dead leaves fallen to the ground in late autumn, protecting the tree roots from the cold through the winter. The work holds itself up, hugging its parts together and pressing provisionally against the wall.

Fig 7. “year counter, flesh marker”[17] installed in my studio, March 2022.

Fig 8. “year counter, flesh marker” installed at Zavitz Gallery, December 2021.

[17] This title comes from a list of kennings for “raven” found in *Skaldskaparmal*, in the prose *Edda*. Ravens, in old norse cosmology, invoke “thought” and “memory” – Odin’s two ravens.

root runes

One night out I'm drinking, standing staring down the street in the snow. Something in my perception shifts and I'm imagining all the shapes of the barren branches reflected below the sidewalk, underfoot. I'm feeling the way the roots are holding all of the ground together.

Named Urth, Verthandi, and Skuld (past, present, future), there are three *norns* or fates who tend to the world tree *Yggdrasil*, coating it with a white mud from Urth's well – the well of the past:

> Green by Urth's well does it ever grow
> Thence come the maidens mighty in wisdom,
> Three from the dwelling down 'neath the tree;[18]

Living beneath one of the tree's roots, the three work in tandem – past – present – future – carving runes into the skin of the tree. In scoring the wood, they set the fates of those living in the human realm, *Midgard* – a realm bordered by the eyelashes of the first giant, Ymir.

Beneath another root lives the dragon, Nithhogg, who is always gnawing at the tree. In the branches of the ash tree lives an eagle, between whose eyes lives a hawk. There are more

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[18] "Voluspo," in *The Poetic Edda: The Mythological Poems*, trans. Henry Adam Bellows (New York: Dover Editions, 2004), 9.

norns, many norns, and norns of many races: god and dwarf and giant and elf norns. Stags run through the branches, chewing the tree from it's topside, and there is a squirrel, Ratatoskr, who runs up and down the tree, carrying hateful messages back and forth between Nithhogg and the eagle. The tree is living and dying, being cared for and cut into, chewed on.

Yggdrasil spans everything.

loose threads

I'm standing in the kitchen bathed in the soft orange-pink glow of the street lights, and I'm staring at the red numbers on my digital clock. I've slept for four hours, but I wake up thinking that I've slept through the night. The hot water radiator has swarmed, swelled, and is sweltering the front room full of heat – cooking the air – so I crack open the windows and mix the cold with the warm air, like bathwater. A car sits idling outside, blasting music though it's box body. The sounds are vague, dampened by the steel and the glass and plastic, the upholstered-foam seating.

At three or five in the morning I'm sure I can hear an animal in the wall, scratching, though perhaps I'm dreaming, always dreaming, again and again. It's like the sound of singing, muffled but audible from the other side of my friend's closed door. I open my eyes.

As I speak it aloud, the word ‘friends’ feels strange inside my mouth. The shape of it is always changing. The variables keep moving around. The threads between people can feel fragile, strong, sticky like a spider’s silk, or else tangled together like the fibres of something felted. Sometimes knotted or woven, broken. Revelry, unravelling.

The goddess Freyja, an almost-homonym for the word fraying, governs sex, love, lust, beauty, and fertility, and also death, war, and an old form of magic known as *seiðr*. Etymologically *seiðr* means thread or cord, and the practice of this magic was understood as a form of spinning, with “spirits sent forth in the shape of threads in order to attract things.”[19] And while the *noun* fray might indicate some central form of action — defined as “a usually disorderly or protracted fight, struggle, or dispute” — the verb, *the action*, of fraying happens along along the outer edges of the fabric. It happens on the fringe. It happens on the threshold of being and not being, becoming something else.

thread breath

A billboard-like structure stands alone in the middle of the room. Built out of two-by-fours, the front of the structure faces the wall at a slight angle. The sharp, line-based shapes of

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[19] Eldar Heide, “Spirits through respiratory passages” in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles*, ed. John McKinnel, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick (Durham: University of Durham, 2006), 350–58.

the wood are rune-like, resembling an inverted wyn rune (ᚹ).[20] The wooden frame is covered with chickenwire, front and back, with a large, crumpled piece of clear plastic sheeting compressed between the two layers. Scrap paper armatures, dotted with brass grommets, are fastened to the back panel of chickenwire. The different colours of paper drum out a rhythm: brown kraft paper, blue poster board, light brown paper packaging patterned with white images of wheat. Each armature holds some length of plastic fringe. The fringe is made from plastic packaging that's been painted with gesso and cut into thin strips. These were once bread bags, apple bags, chip bags, marshmallow, pierogi, noodle and carrot bags, collected slowly over many months. Now seen as fringe, they flutter, rustling, making a sound like the wind passing through birch tree branches. The twists and loops of the chickenwire resemble a fishing net or a crocheted garment. The long lines of wire running vertically recall the warp in a weave.

There is a photograph facing the structure, pressed behind a sheet of plexiglass that's been bolted to the wall. The photograph shows a welded wire fence surrounding a snow-covered field, with dead and dormant plant life protruding from the snow in places. Ratty strands of purple ribbon are tied to two of the fence posts, drawing waving lines in the wind. Behind the field is the dark, straight line of the train tracks, and behind that, the black edge of the woods bordered by a grey winter sky. A black, commercial grade floor fan sits between the wooden structure and the photograph, pushing its breath towards the strands of plastic fringe. Directly behind the fan, a

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[20] The wunjo or wyn rune is commonly interpreted as meaning joy, lust or pleasure, and is translated as the letter 'w' in the Latin alphabet.

Bluetooth speaker rests on the edge of a brick, playing a recording of my own voice humming and harmonizing with the fan's whirring voice, which sings in F#.

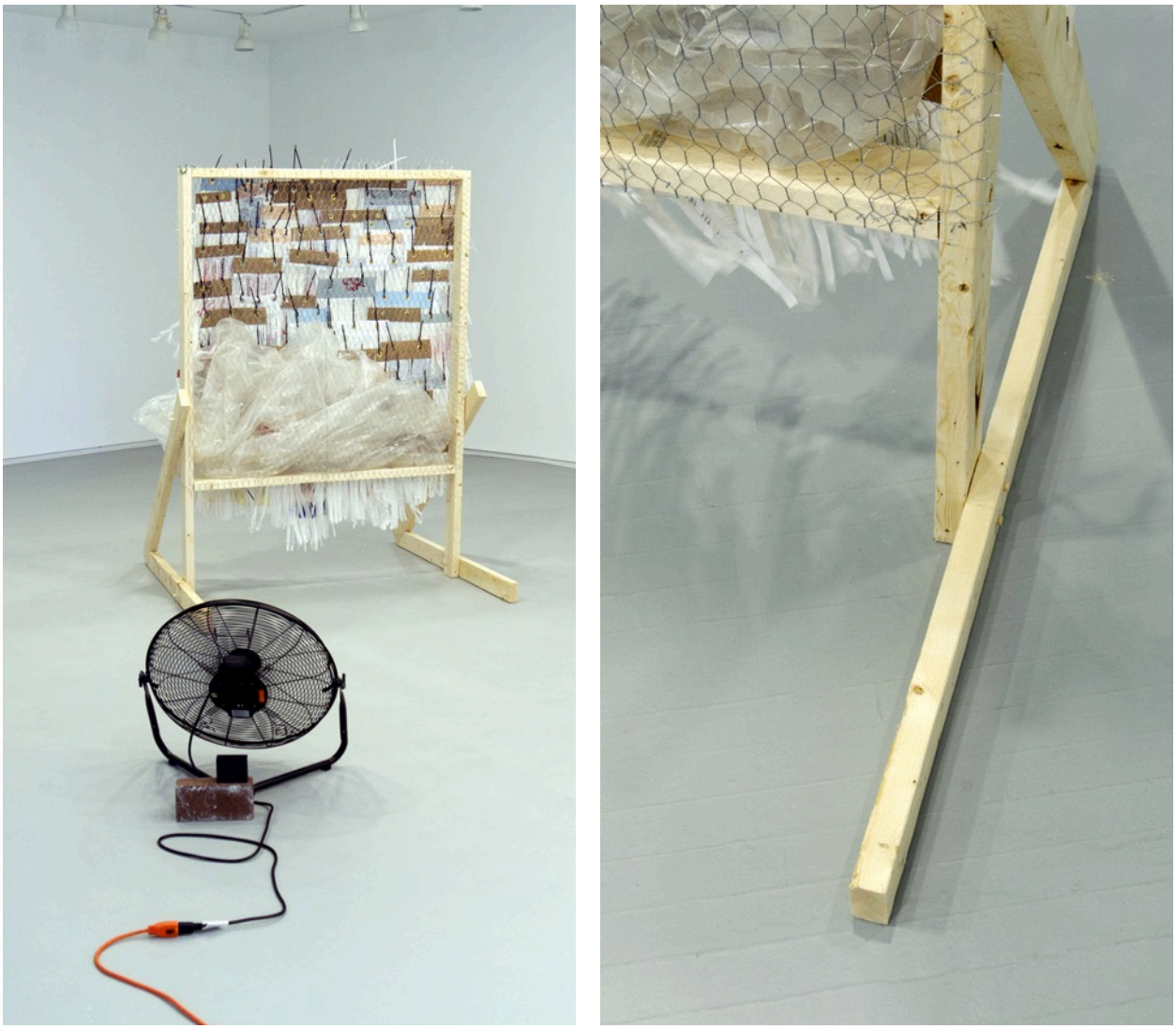

Fig 9. "The strand like the spirit. The spirit like the breath." installed at Zavitz Gallery, April 2021.

Fig 10. “The strand like the spirit. The spirit like the breath.” installed at Zavitz Gallery, April 2021.

body-adjacent

My breath and my heartbeat slow and then quicken inside my chest. They are moved by the presence and the absence of others, by the heat and the cold weather, by various forms of exertion, a drink, a meal, a sequence of movements, a memory. I'm not sure how to count all of the people and the dreams that I've lost in the last five years, but the loss comes towards me in waves. The grief feels lead-like, liquid – flooding every limb in my body and weighing me closer to the ground. Small actions loom larger: I get out of bed, I shower, I brush my teeth.

Towards the end of Egil's saga, Egil Skallagrímsson composes a lengthy poem that's bound up by grief. Having lost one young son to the sea in a sudden storm, and another son to fever, he struggles to craft a verse that might honour their memory:

> My tongue is sluggish
> for me to move,
> my poem's scales
> ponderous to raise.
> The god's prize [poetry]
> is beyond my grasp,
> tough to drag out
> from my mind's haunts.

Feeling betrayed, Egil calls upon Odin repeatedly throughout the poem, though he never calls him by name. Instead Odin is named by his physical attributes and by his relationship to other animate things: he is called One-Eye, the brewer of storms, the lord of spears, the friend of chariots, the ruler of wealth, the architect of victory, the brother of Vili, Mimr's friend, and the wolf's adversary.[21] All of these names are kennings – compound words or phrases used in place of a more familiar nouns, often referencing interconnections formed elsewhere in the larger story-system of norse cosmology. Defined as a poetic form of circumlocution,[22] they delineate something by drawing into the space that surrounds it, circling around it. Elsewhere in the poem, the sea is called the killer of ships and the blood from the giant's wounded neck. Egil's children

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[21] "Brewer of storms" and "lord of spears" and "the friend of chariots" and "the ruler of wealth" and "the architect of victory" all refer to Odin's vast arena of influence. He is a patron god of poetry, knowledge, war, sorcery, healing, and bravery in battle, among other things.

"One-Eyed" because Odin traded his right eye for drink from Mimr's well of wisdom.

"Brother of Vili" because at the beginning of the world Odin was one of three brothers: Odin, Vili, and Ve.

"Mimr's friend" because of his friendship with Mimr, the wise giant living beneath one of the roots of the world tree, Yggdrasil.

"The wolf's adversary" refers to his enmity with Fenrir (or Fenris) wolf, one of the three children of Odin's blood-brother Loki, the trickster. Loki shifted shape to bear and birth these children (Fenrir, Midgarthsorm, and Hel), and they were conceived through his union with the giantess Angrbotha. Because it was prophesied that Loki's children would bring down the end of the world (Ragna-rok) Odin and the other gods exiled and restrained them. They bound Fenrir wolf with custom-made fetters, forged from the noise of a cat's paw, the beard of a woman, the roots of a mountain, the sinews of a bear, the breath of a fish, and the spittle of a bird.

[22] In Old Icelandic, the word 'kenning' can also mean 'emotion', 'feeling', 'knowledge' and 'teachings', and the first use of the term 'kenning' is found in Snorri Sturluson *Skáldskaparmál* ('poetry building rules') in the Prose Edda. In one passage he describes: "There are also those terms that are put in place of men's names. We call these *vidkenningar* [circumlocutions] or *sannkenningar* [true descriptions] or *fornofn* [substitutions]."

are the ash trees grown from his stock, and his family is a wall built from his father's kin. The rocks and cliffs of the shoreline are a boathouse door, and a raging surf is the heat of a fever.

Throughout the intricate story-world of the sagas and eddas, men are pine and oak trees and thorns are brooches. A (thorn) brooch-goddess is a woman, and a woman is also a thread-goddess or an herb goddess or a wave of gold. Gold is sea fire, or a wave's flame, or a giant's laughter, and the wind is the brother of the sea. Spears pluck lives like flowers, and their corpses are eagles' and ravens' food — Odin's Huginn and Muninn – wound-birds gulping blood — and blood is both water, a wound river, and a spitting flame. People's fates are runes carved into the roots of the world tree, immovable, and as a woman gazes heartsick across the river, her eyes cast a beam of light from two eyelid-moons.

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