Antediluvian

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ANTEDILUVIAN

by

JUDITH PARADY

Under the Direction of Ruth Stanford

ABSTRACT

As we move into a time of accelerated change there is a need to center ourselves and recognize our innate strengths. Through the metaphor of the Antediluvian we are reminded that humans have survived global upheaval many times. This body of work, inspired by flood mythologies, encourages those who seek guidance to look anew.

The primary motifs are salt and boats. The boats are made of paper and reed; you cannot sail them, they are a device with which to visualize transcension. Salt water, (brine), represents the oceans and our dependence on both water and salt for life. It also reminds us that too much of either leads to destruction and death. Balance and sound navigation are required. This installation of encaustic paintings, sculptural objects and talismans represent encoded data informed by the non-verbal language of art intended to stimulate preparation, mentally and spiritually, for the challenges coming our way.

INDEX WORDS: Sculpture, Climate change, Encaustic collage, Flood myths, Boats, Talismans
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JUDITH PARADY

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by

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DEDICATION

For all who seek to know more, to know themselves,

and who share the process with others.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The best part of any adventure is meeting all the other beings intersecting at this one place in time. I am so grateful to have been on this trip with my fellow MFA grad students, especially my sculpture family.

I want to recognize and thank all my teachers for their generosity, wisdom, and insight. Thank you to the art administrative staff for their patience and guidance. Thank you Nedda for showing me how to find useful stuff in the world. And thank you Nimer for making our studio a great place to work.
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1 INTRODUCTION

When faced with uncertainty or a difficult situation, I sometimes imagine myself in the future looking back on today’s challenge. I ask “future me” for the knowledge provided by hindsight; what can she tell “present me” that would help with a decision or warn of yet unseen danger. “Future me” is surprisingly effective at pointing out obvious realities that “present me” prefers to overlook. It’s an effective exercise that strengthens intuition, but “present me” still has the option of disregarding the message.

Many aspects of my work as a metalsmith are technical, requiring an understanding of math, thermodynamics, and chemistry. Things don’t go well if you ignore or try to bypass the science. Some of my students take a long time to accept this and only learn through repeated failure. But once tuned in to the materials and processes they’re able to recognize subtle hints that warn of disaster before it happens. In this way, awareness can look like intuition rather than applied or learned information.

Data is offered to us in many forms, some encoded in numbers, others, pulses of energy. I value them equally. But seeing the clues is not enough. Success depends on properly assessing messages for veracity, and deciding when to act. This desire to know what lies ahead, and prepare for it, is the seed of my thesis work. In the Antediluvian I compare flood mythology and contemporary climate change to explore the many ways humans receive information and respond to the message. The art works generated by this exploration employ imagery and materials that span many realms and ages. With it I offer appreciation for an array of data sources and the transformational power of art.
1.1 Data

Simple record keeping shows empirically that current temperatures on land and sea are rising. [Figure 1] The effect of this change is seen in the rapid melting of polar ice caps and the thawing of the once perpetually frozen tundra. As glaciers melt, fresh water added to the oceans causes both a rise in sea level and lowers the oceans’ ability to moderate temperatures. [Figure 2, Figure 3] Stronger storms and increased development of coastal cities means more people than ever are affected by floods. Our environment is transforming more rapidly than we expected a few years ago and faster than we can adapt. Research predicts that within a few generations food shortages and menacing temperatures will impact much of the planet. But “knowing” what will occur is motivating relatively few people to act; low lying areas are still being developed and the verified causes of climate change are publicly doubted.

Today we generally recognize science as a more reliable source of data than what ancient peoples received from their otherworldly informants. It is interesting to look at our interpretation and response to evidence-based science compared to their interpretation and response to unverifiable sources of guidance regarding the natural world.

1.2 Myth

Floods have long impacted the planet; their occurrence is recorded in the geologic record and in mythologies. Cultures from every continent have flood myths, [Figure 4] some dating back thousands of years. This indicates that people have always dealt with climate change in various forms, and that floods are so devastating they become subject of myths.

There is a common element contained in every mythical story: a few humans, often just one, are warned by a deity or spirit entity that something bad is about to happen. They are
instructed to build a boat and ride out the storm. The goal was to survive and repopulate the earth. The fact that we still occupy the planet is, perhaps, proof that these humans acted on the advice.

Through the metaphor of the Antediluvian, my thesis reminds us that humans have survived environmental upheavals many times. Unlike today, flood mythologies describe human reaction to immediate danger, but this is the first time we’ve been warned decades in advance. If we are in the time before the flood, my artistic response to the message is, “Build a boat.”

THE WORK

Antediluvian concerns concepts and imagery associated with flood mythology: boats, survival, and a willingness to act based on intuition or guidance from an unverified source. Incorporated equally are elements of science and technology, of which I comprehend no more (and no less) than I do the metaphysical, but which hold a visceral attraction. I instinctively chose materials with distinct content, heavy with meaning, but I am not using them as a lexicon. These materials exist outside of language; they are essential elements on this planet and in the human psyche. They have a power independent of my artistic manipulation.

1.3 Boats

“Boats and ships have long occupied an important place in human affairs.”

Nearly every culture has a need for boats. Anything that displaces water will float and ancient boat design varied widely in shape, construction methods, and materials. While boat technology and design evolved into the complex forms of today, it is still a joyful thing to glide
quietly in a small kayak or canoe. It is this elemental shape, like a child’s drawing sketched with a few lines, that I reference in my work. Crafted from paper, mine are dream boats floating only in one’s imagination - a way to transit through the danger of a metaphorical flood into a new time.

Each of the four boats in my exhibit is made using the same materials, a permanent armature of reed covered with a skin of handmade paper. Yet, in the making, each boat developed a distinct personality. The exhibit installation grouping suggests beings gathered together for safety. [Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8]

The boats were the first objects I made for Antediluvian. Like my students, I suffered months of failed attempts as I tried to force the materials to perform against their nature. I finally learned how to make a basketry armature; and to form the wet paper pulp into sheets, allowing me to successfully complete the form I sought. Following the prime directive to “Build a boat” was all that concerned me until I had completed the first piece- Eva Marie. Having one of the hard-earned forms exist outside of my imagination allowed me to consider the rest of the objects in the exhibit. Making the work and understanding the work are two separate actions. It is through making things that I study the concepts of my art. Handling the materials and developing processes creates the content.

Martin Puryear is an artist whose work has long fascinated me for its respectful use of natural materials, [Figure 9] and for his ability to span the distance between modernism and craft. His statement in an exhibit catalog resonates with my own experience. “The process of making has always been central to everything I’ve done. How an object will be fashioned has
always been, for me, part of the conceptual process.... For my part the physical act of making a work of art is essential.” 4

### 1.4 Salt and Water

Water is the primary element of flood stories: water coming up fast and unexpectedly, water predicted weeks in advance through dreams and spiritual intercession, water intentionally released onto enemies and unsuspecting villages. In my work, *Antediluvian*, water is implied, not actually present. Salt is the structural basis for this work. It carries the weight of history, myth, and spiritual content. Salt is essential for life, and in excess is deadly. Oceans are salty, to the same degree as our own blood. I use salt to represent water from all parts of the world in the form of brine made from salt gathered from each continent.

Reading Mark Kurlansky’s *Salt, A World History*, after I began working with the material gave me an empathetic understanding of salt’s properties that assisted my exploration and deepened my awareness. “Salt preserves. Until modern times it provided the principal way to preserve food. Egyptians used salt to make mummies. This ability to preserve, to protect against decay, as well as to sustain life, has given salt a broad metaphorical importance . . . Because salt prevents decay, it protects from harm . . . Evil spirits detest salt . . . Salt is a potent and sometimes dangerous substance that has to be handled with care.”5

Though salt is familiar to all, it is less recognizable as the crusty surface of these objects constructed of handmade paper. *Eva Marie* [Figure 6] and *Adamanta* [Figure 5] are coated with fine crystals of sparkly salt. *Eva Marie* uses the grey coarse salt from Portugal, and *Adamanta* is dusted with the pink Himalayan.
The salt crust on Vesica 03 [Figure 10] was produced by soaking handmade paper in brine made from powder-fine white Oryx salt from the Kalahari Desert. As the brine evaporated and salt crystals built up it became apparent the paper would not support the growing weight; I decided to back the paper with bronze mesh. Knowing that salt would create a patina on bronze influenced my choice. Weeks later I observed a bluish grey patina seeping through the salted paper, an unanticipated gift.

Salty Bible, [Figure 12] comprised of a pocket bible soaked in salt water and left to crystalize, evokes the ephemera lost when flood waters inundate a home. The bible is jammed into a sardine can and wired to a piece of slate somewhat denying its sacred authority. The flood story contained in the Old Testament, the story most familiar to Western civilizations, has God instructing Noah to build a boat in advance of a flood intended to cleanse the earth of a human population gone astray. In many other cultures there is no reason for the flood- it just happens, deal with it. I wonder if modern man is reluctant to face of our climate change warnings to avoid accepting blame for the situation.

Morijio is the Japanese tradition of positioning a cone of salt at the door for luck and to ward off evil spirits. All cultures value salt for its ability to cleanse a space, both physically and energetically. Here the cone is presented in a dish I forged from an ounce of fine silver. [Figure 13] The size of the dish is determined by the amount of silver, and the size of the salt cone is dependent on the diameter of the dish. I appreciate having aesthetic decisions determined by the properties of the materials.
1.5 Willingness to Act

Humans use some frame of reference—experience, group wisdom, science, or intuition—to decide that a sign or message has value. But seeking and receiving guidance only benefit those who proceed to act. Based on our history, this action is the step most difficult to take.

1.5.1 Bold Choices

*Shrine 22,* is a stack of old cinder block and boards which stands mute unless you recognize the I Ching hexagram #22 *Grace and Beauty* in its six-row arrangement. 6 [Figure 14] This was the final piece I made for the exhibit. In times of stress, I often seek solace through divination. Desiring confirmation that my work as an artist contributes to society, and that pursuing the MFA was valid, I threw the three coins receiving #22 for my answer. The reading associated with the hexagram resonates perfectly with my psychological state at the time of the exploration, particularly this line: . . . “Through appreciation of graceful forms in human culture, we apprehend the pure beauty of the ideal, of life raised above the struggle for survival . . .”7

Initially envisioned as an altar in a shrine, I ultimately decided to show the hexagram stack as an independent object. The piece is contrary to every other work in the show; it is conceptual, made quickly, with what was no real craft or process involved, from discarded cheap materials. But I felt sure about my choices and wanted to honor my intuition through action.

1.5.2 Sacred Geometry

Geometric forms can convey messages. Two pieces in *Antediluvian- Pink Vesica* [Figure 11] and *Vesica03* use a vesica piscis. The vesica piscis (also spelled pisces) is an ancient shape found in all religions and cultures, and one that I use frequently. It is formed by the intersection
of two overlapping circles and frequently refers to the Word of God made manifest, or the action God employed to “make it so.” The message I want to convey throughout Antediluvian is the value in acting—making something happen. I chose the navette of the vesica piscis for these two wall pieces, but also see it reflected in the outline of my boats. The boats are three-dimensional expressions of the same marquis form.

1.6 Talismans

“We may conclude from a constantly growing wealth of evidence that art in its origins was magic, a magic aid towards mastering a real but unexplored world. Religion, science, and art were combined in a latent form – germinally as it were – in magic.”

Talismans are amulets or charms worn to protect from harm and bring luck. From the first humans, across all cultures, we have sought the magic provided by an object made with intention using sacred materials.

I created the Locket Talisman to bring courage and protection while navigating challenging circumstances. When not worn it rests in a hand-carved pink Himalayan salt box on my home altar. The salt cleanses the talisman of unhelpful energies accumulated while being worn. The altar is my location for meditation and centering rituals. When wearing the locket, I am reminded of my spiritual practice by this association. Referencing elements of the Antediluvian, the locket is made of silver and gold, contains a thirty-carat faceted aquamarine, water imagery, inscription, and scent. The materials selected, and the act of making, all contribute to its power. [Figure 16]
I feel that, like the work of the shaman, artists change the energy of the planet through making art. In the exhibit the *Talisman* is adjacent to the *Salty Bible*. The *Bible* paired with the *Talisman* creates a diptych of ambiguous meaning, either can be a source of guidance and comfort, or divination.

The diptych of the *Talisman* locket and the *Salty Bible* reminds us that one person’s religion is another’s divination.

### 1.7 Science

“The beauty of large single crystals is arresting. The flatness of their faces, the sharpness of their angles, the purity of their colors will give you deep satisfaction.”

*Molecular Data* is a collection of jars containing live crystals in their growing solution. [Figure 17] The saturated colors of the liquids are reflected on the gallery wall. They demonstrate an intersection of art and science, and are an example of encoded data available to those who know how to read it. I grew the crystals from chemicals known for producing large specimens. While still in their growing solutions crystals are subject to the subtlest changes in temperature. I adapted my environment to meet their needs, keeping the studio at a constant seventy degrees, lest they dissolve back into solution. I lost several rounds of crystals before accepting this fact. Attuning to their requirements felt the same as learning to care for a goldfish. I wonder if our definition of sentience is too narrow.

Crystals are very much a part of modern life: both cell phone and computer chip technology are based on the stability of silicon and quartz molecules. A crystal’s shape is determined by the atomic arrangement of its molecules in solid state. “The orderliness of
solids is a rather astonishing fact of nature. Physicists have become used to the fact, and they often forget that they do not really know why atoms adopt orderly arrangements.”11 As with myth or divination, we do not need to understand why something “is” to benefit from it.

Using scientific phenomena to create aesthetically rich art work is the purview of many contemporary artists. I value efforts to visualize unseen forces that affect us. “The art of David Haines and Joyce Hinterding is characterized by its openness to the unseen forces that permeate human experience.” 12 The range of their exploration is exhilarating. I am particularly excited by their ability to create work expressing scientific and metaphysical concepts, such as Haines’ use of scent, and Hinterding’s beautiful constructions. Illustrated here [Figure 18] is Hinterding’s Aeriology composed of twenty kilometers of copper wire coiled around the columns of the gallery creating an antenna that resonates with inaudible radio frequencies. 13

1.8 Technology

“Data bits -- magnetic states representing on and off -- are recorded to a particulate medium bonded to a substrate of Mylar plastic.” 14

Magnetic tape is a beautiful substance representing the rapidly evolving state of data storage and our challenge to stay abreast of developing message delivery systems. The puddles of tape on the floor point to the flood of electronic messages drowning us, the flow of which is so overwhelming, it is impossible to distinguish fact from fake making it harder than ever to discern correct action. The unspooled tape is black, shiny and has a lively movement in the room’s air currents alluding to the free-flowing nature of information. We pick and choose what
messages get through to us and what to believe based on emotions and affiliations rather than empirical evidence.

The use of magnetic tape for *Video Net* [Figure 15] and the encaustic collages contributes to the *Antediluvian* narrative both aesthetically and conceptually. It contains encoded data accessible only when certain conditions are met, and it is pleasingly reminiscent of kelp. Mounted in a corner of the gallery, *Video Net* is a lattice-like weaving of half inch video tape creating a thin wall of potential energy. Vibrating shadows are cast onto the corner wall behind the net creating a graphic depth and volume.

The three encaustic collages, *Magnetic Audio Vertical*, *Magnetic Audio Horizontal*, and *Magnetic Video Vertical* [Figure 19, Figure 20] are a union of ancient artmaking materials—handmade paper, beeswax and damar resin with magnetic tape bringing together the ends of the spectrum illustrating art making and encoded messages. Embedding code-carrying magnetic tape in layers of wax takes away the possibility of retrieving the data, but also preserves this delicate material as in a time-capsule.

**CONCLUSION**

My research led me to a book by Mark C Taylor, *Refiguring the Spiritual*, “published in conjunction with a series of conversations with leading contemporary artists...sponsored by the Institute for Religion, Culture, and Public Life and the Visual Arts Program, School of Arts at Columbia University.” It is an insightful reporting on today’s art world with in-depth discussion of work by four artists by whom I am profoundly influenced: Bueys, Barney, Turrell,
and Goldsworthy. Taylor’s writing helped me come to terms with my own art practice, and focus my ideas for this thesis. In his chapter “Financialization of Art” he writes:

> With so much hanging in the balance, the future seems more uncertain than ever. There is a palpable anxiety afoot today that I have never before experienced. The crisis of confidence plaguing individuals and institutions is a crisis of faith. We no longer know what to believe or whom to trust. At such a moment art might seem an unlikely resource to guide reflection and shape action. If, however, God and the imagination are, as Wallace Stevens insists, one, then perhaps art can create an opening that is the space of hope. The wager of this book is that by refiguring the spiritual, art might redeem the world.¹⁶

In *Antediluvian* flood is a metaphor for massive change or challenges. These can be changes we anticipate, or those that come upon us suddenly. Art is an instrument for visualization. In making this work I can imagine a transformation and transition for myself, and perhaps others will find it useful as well.
ENDNOTES

1 “Of all the legends of a great flood recorded in literature, by far the oldest is the Babylonian, or, rather, the Sumerian; for we now know that, ancient as was the Babylonian version of the story, it was derived by the Babylonians from their still more ancient predecessors, the Sumerians, from whom the Semitic inhabitants of Babylonia appear to have derived the principal elements of their civilization.” James George Frazer, "Ancient Stories of a Great Flood," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 46 (Jul. - Dec., 1916): 233.

2 “At their lowliest over some 12,000 years they have been the means of earning a livelihood for countless generations of fishermen. As transport, growing in size and complexity, they have played a crucial part in the spread of new things and new ideas, linking islands and continents, opening up waterways and overcoming obstacle to communication: forests, mountains and marsh.” Basil Greenhill, *Archaeology of the Boat; A New Introductory Study* (Midletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1976), 15.

3 I accomplished this mission through a fellowship from Georgia State University allowing me to attend a papermaking workshop at Arrowmont School of Arts and Craft. Under the guidance of sculptor Jo Stealey, and her studio assistant Leandra Spangler, I learned to create permanent armatures for the handmade paper forms using basketry techniques. In two weeks Jo and Leandra downloaded thirty years of papermaking experience into the minds and hands of their eager students. What I learned there refined the course of my work going forward.


6 Depending on your outlook, throwing the I Ching can be an amusing pastime or thought-provoking divination. The process involves asking a question then tossing coins to arrive at a configuration of solid and broken lines indicating which of the 64 readings is you answer. Very much like our modern-day oracle- Google, the quality of the answers is dependent on the clarity of the question.


11 Holden and Morrison, 25.


16 Taylor, 15.
REFERENCES


This graph illustrates the change in global surface temperature relative to 1951-1980 average temperatures. Seventeen of the 18 warmest years in the 136-year record all have occurred since 2001, with the exception of 1998. The year 2016 ranks as the warmest on record. (Source: NASA/GISS). This research is broadly consistent with similar constructions prepared by the Climatic Research Unit and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

GLOBAL LAND-OCEAN TEMPERATURE INDEX / LATEST ANNUAL AVERAGE

Data source: NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS). Credit: NASA/GISS

![Figure 1 Global Temperature Index](source: climate.nasa.gov)

**Figure 1 Global Temperature Index**

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SEA LEVEL CHANGE

![Figure 2 Sea Level Change](ground data: 1870-2000 Data source: Coastal tide gauge records. Credit: CSIRO)

GROUND DATA: 1870-2000 Data source: Coastal tide gauge records. Credit: CSIRO
LATEST MEASUREMENT: December 2017 88 (± 4) mm

Sea level rise is caused primarily by two factors related to global warming: the added water from melting ice sheets and glaciers and the expansion of seawater as it warms.

Rate of Change 3.2 millimeters per year margin: ±0.4mm

Figure 3 Sea Level

SATELLITE DATA: 1993-PRESENT

Data source: Satellite sea level observations. Credit: NASA Goddard Space Flight Center

A map of the world indicates where the author could locate elaborate flood stories.

Figure 4 World Flood Myths Map

Figure 5 Adamanta

*Adamanta*, handmade paper, reed, copper, salt, twigs; 2017; 7 x 2.5 x 3 feet
*Adamanta* detail, hand forged, salt patinaed copper chain
**Figure 6 Eva Marie**

*Eva Marie*, handmade paper, reed, bronze, salt; 2017; 3 x 1.5 x 1.5 feet

*Eva Marie* detail, bronze deck plate
Figure 7 Leandra

_Leandra_, handmade paper, reed, twine, brass; 2018; 7 x 2.5 x 3 feet

_Leandra_ detail, Patinaed brass ring, reed, handmade paper
**Figure 8 Josephine**

*Josephine*, handmade paper, reed, organdy, twine; 2018; 4 x 1.5 x 1.5 feet

**Figure 9 Martin Puryear**

Figure 10 Vesica 03

Vesica 03, handmade paper, bronze, salt; 2017; 17 x 11 x 3 inches. Vesica03, detail

Figure 11 Pink Vesica

Pink Vesica, cement, pigment, wax; 2018; 22 x 15 inches
Figure 12 Salty Bible

_Salty Bible_, bible, sardine can, slate, wire, salt; 2017; 6 x 6 x 2 inches

Figure 13 Morijio

_left_  _Morijio_, salt cone in hand forged silver dish; 2018; 3 x 3 x 5 inches  
_right_  _Companion_, boron crystals in jar; 2017; 2 x 2 x 4 inches
Figure 14 Shrine 22

center front- Shrine 22, cinder blocks, wood boards illustrating I Ching hexagram #22 - Grace and Beauty
center rear- Video Net  left- Magnetic Audio Vertical, and Magnetic Audio Horizontal

Figure 15 Video Net

Video Net, steel rod, video tape, shadow; 2018; 9w x 10h feet.  Video Net, detail
Figure 16 Talisman
left- *Talisman* (locket), aquamarine, silver, gold, silk, paper, scent, carved salt box; 2017; 7.5 x 9"
right- Diptych installation, *Talisman, Salty Bible*

Figure 17 Crystals
*Molecular Data* - Jars, chemistry, crystals; 2018
Figure 18 Hinterding

Figure 19 encaustic MAV, MVV
right- *Magnetic Video Vertical*, 48 x 60 inches.
Figure 20 encaustic MAH

*Magnetic Audio Horizontal*, encaustic collage on panel with handmade paper, audio cassette tape, 36 x 40 inches, 2018.

*Magnetic Audio Horizontal*, detail