

Il n'y a pas de vraie liberté si l'on ne peut pas faire face à la solitude.

[There is no true freedom if you cannot cope with loneliness.]

— Julie Delporte, *This Woman's Work*

Venetia Dale creates sculptures in pewter—a malleable metal historically found in homeware—and fiber. In her metal works, Dale gives value to the fragments of daily life, including food leftover from her children's meals and her sister's dead and alive houseplants, by casting them in pewter—a malleable metal historically found in kitchenware and domestic trinkets. Her fiber sculptures reimagine the unfinished decorative elements found in collected tablecloths, runners, and hooked rugs. These materials and processes record the stewardship of the home: the lineages of caretaking, family, and the passing of time. For Dale, these ideas are inseparable from the physical, emotional, and social frameworks of labor as experienced in those space we consider the home, the private sphere of life that nonetheless is intimately public. Dale's work teases at these tenuous binaries of public and private, home and house, craft and art, labor and production. Countering a framework of continuous production that defines the artist's labor under capitalism, Dale's work instead engages with the question, and the problem, of what it means to be a maker, and what a maker can offer through the radical act of rest.

With this focus on making, Dale's sculptures invite a reconsideration of the value placed the small, repeated, and often unacknowledged acts one makes to care for home and family. Her materials are distinctive for their connotations with not only domestic labor, but also those forms of caretaking and intimacy that the idea of the home conjures. Equally as significant are the themes of industry, productivity, and leisure long woven into critiques of craft as art and as women's work. Such associations are doubly personal for Dale, whose studio occupies the basement and attic of her house, raising a family between the phases of her career as well as the floors of her studio world. Her life thus permeates the work, and also calls into question what it means to continue to choose to make work amidst other asks of one's attention, including the task of caring for others. Dale is candid about these experiences in her own career, often describing the years she created only between naps, appointments, teaching, or late into night, and sometimes did not create at all. The changing circumstances of her life outside the studio further shaped the expectations she placed on herself as an artist, turning to the medium of fiber when working with pewter posed health concerns during pregnancy. "So I taught myself sewing and I started making booties and blankets in a very obsessive way," recalls Dale. "And I realize now that it was really a way to control this unknowable future."

In *Fray: Art and Textile Politics*, art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson deploys the metaphor of "fraying" to describe, among other concepts, "the material wearing out of textiles, the undoing of threads, the pulling of fibers through strain and repeated use." In such a framework, Bryan-Wilson argues that frayed thread or the unraveled stitch is imbued with affects of nervous tension, irritation, and discomfort. For Dale, what is frayed in her work is the feeling of incompleteness that her sculptures evokes, both within their physical state and in the narratives that surround their creation. Her objects recover the quiet power found in the pleasure of making not towards a purposeful for end, but simply to keep making—but also to honor when making must stop. As one examines the collaged patchwork of Dale's embroideries—aptly titled *Piecing Together*—one sees as much Dale's hand in the whimsical arrangements as much as others' whose temporary attentions and choices at one point entered into the realization of the work. Dale's care for these others' hands is evocative of the communal nature of learned craft traditions; she does not pick up the stopped works to complete them herself, but allows the pause to hold its own story. "I am a mother and the keeper of time in my family," says her artist statement. "By holding space in my work for celebrating a pause, or a fleeting gesture of care, these sculptural works become a monument to my labor as well as their own keepers of time."

The two most prominent mediums of Dale's work forward these ideas differently by the mutable properties of their materials, yet together help home a practice that is grounded in honoring an artist's choice to continue making work as much for one's self as for the work, too. Her incomplete embroideries most directly speak to this conviction, begun largely in response to her need to continue to feel productive, to have control, over those moments in her life when such experiences felt elusive. Certainly, fiber art has been the subject of significant scholarship on gender and feminist practices, negotiating the boundary between art and craft as well as the direction of a single maker, bringing questions of community and the collective in the dissemination of patterns, the adoption of motifs, and the practice of learned and taught tradition. Within Dale's work, these histories take on a distinctively ephemeral mode. Her

embroidered works and hooked rug assemblages are in fact drawn from incomplete or abandoned projects she sources from online retail spaces such as eBay. Dale is specific with her interest in those projects that have been abandoned or paused, yet still made available for others such as herself to purchase, either to continue or adapt into new forms, the latter being Dale's own interventions.

Metalwork holds a parallel focus on the history of artisan and artist guilds, the integration of mass production in use-value works such as tableware and other housewares, and the practice of reuse in alloyed metals repurposed to new forms. Pewter, a soft metal with another distinctively American history in the fields of art and material culture, is Dale's preferred material for her own metal works, purchased as sets of small bricks that can be melted at low temperatures to be shaped and set into rubber molds she makes herself, often from the refuse of other objects in her home—discarded orange peels, fallen stems and leaves, the last piece of a bar of soap. The sculpture series *a gathering of something* includes small and large scale pewter works composed of these fragments of her life, from her children's lunches to her sister's dead houseplants. In these works, and across her practice, Dale's art finds kinship in the language of the fragment, especially as understood in the gesture to cease totality or a whole form, suspended instead in rest. "I come to my practice as an observer," explains Dale. "I need to observe the fragments [of life] that have meaning that other people might be overlooking. So there isn't a line between my identity in my life and my identity as an artist. Those things are completely intertwined."

-Anni Pullagura, Assistant Curator, The Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston

2023 James and Audrey Foster Prize

First established in 1999, the James and Audrey Foster nurtures and recognizes exceptional Boston-area artists. The *2023 James and Audrey Foster Prize* exhibition presents the work of Cicely Carew (born in Los Angeles), Venetia Dale (born in Winfield, IL), and Yu-Wen Wu (born in Taipei, Taiwan). Each presentation includes both recent and new artworks that engage with the theme of states of change. Carew's suspended sculptures and wall-based paintings wield found and repurposed materials to generate ideas of movement and freedom in the painted line. Dale's metal and fiber sculptures gather fragments of daily life to reflect the emotional landscape of everyday moments within the home. Wu's video, installations, and drawing practice assemble both ephemeral and precious materials such as tea, gold, and porcelain to consider themes of migration, memory, and cultural ties to family and community. Experienced together, the exhibition examines our tenuous relationships to expressions of care and the passing of time through the transformation of artistic materials in the making of an artwork.