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***Cloth Dripping***

**Mary Grisey**

**March 18 – April 30, 2016**

*“...cloth dripping...” (Fragment 147)<sup>1</sup>*

In the exhibition *Cloth Dripping*, artist Mary Grisey creates an installation of cloth weavings, sculpture, and sound. These weavings are suspended from the ceiling and surround a terracotta structure glazed in a mixture of black with subtle colours visible from underneath. Bearing the texture of seashells and fingerprints, the terracotta form holds up a vessel of water. The soft, haunting sound of a woman’s voice singing emanates from within it, and quietly permeates its surroundings. The weaving is earth-coloured and dyed with natural materials. It is fragmented and frayed because of its contact with rust, and woven into it are remnants of latex, and found, uncoiled rope. The weavings, each approximately eight feet long, are sewn together one after another and hung into an immersive wall-like form that surrounds both the vessel and the viewer. In its ruinous state *Cloth Dripping* recalls a sense of awe, like the discovery of something ancient and wonderful.

Mary Grisey’s process of weaving includes the act of undoing her weavings. They become changed through the application of rust and natural dyes. They are inspired by, and draw from, the fragments of Sappho, an ancient Greek poet from c. 610 to c. 570 BCE, whose works are primarily lost but whose surviving fragments have been documented and

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<sup>1</sup> Carson, Anne. *If Not Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. Canada: Vintage Canada Edition, 2002. Pg. 147

translated.<sup>2</sup> For Grisey, Sappho is the central figure from which the installation's themes of loss, love, and the metaphysical emerge. The myth of Sappho, an epic tale from Ovid's *Heroides*, relays the story in which the poet, full of grief over the loss of her love Phaon, plummets off a Leucadian Cliff into the sea in an attempt to rid herself of her pain. The artist is interested in “the ruin and beauty of both the body and the psyche,”<sup>3</sup> seeking to convey the profound power of this emotion, and invites viewers in a space to consider what is possibly beyond the body, and beyond the self.

*with what eyes?*<sup>4</sup>

The most famous translated anthology of Sappho's work, and the one that Grisey references, is titled *If not winter*, by Anne Carson. Some of Sappho's works, like “...cloth dripping...” exist only in such fragments- bits of lost text, two words placed side-by-side, or separated by blank expanses where holes or tears appeared in the papyrus. They are phrases that skip a word, leave you with emptiness instead of meaning, or do not begin or end but surface in the middle. In reading the fragments, Carson seems both to have translated the words themselves, as much as considered the lost meaning in the spaces that surround them. There is a sense of strange reverence evoked by encountering something lost to decay, one which the artist's weavings present in their processes of undoing. The cloth becomes a metaphor which recalls the cycle of formation and dissolution, which follows the notion that “[b]reaks are always, and fatally, reinscribed in an old cloth that must continually, interminably be undone.”<sup>5</sup>

The weavings in Grisey's installation are made with strands of linen that meticulously accumulate in the repetition of thread woven over her loom. Each weave dictates what will come after and tells the artist what the final work will become.<sup>6</sup> After the woven piece is formed, it is then unmade by placing rusted metal or acid on its surface. These substances make the material undergo a type of alchemy. The weavings begin to carry the transformative, degenerative processes of rusting metal, and they uncoil and transform

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<sup>2</sup> “Sappho Biography” 15 Mar 20 16 <<http://biography.com/people/sappho-947166> >.

<sup>3</sup> Grisey, Mary. “CV/Statement.” Web. 15. Jan. 2016 <[www.marygrisey.com/news](http://www.marygrisey.com/news)>.

<sup>4</sup> Carson, Anne. *Fragment 163*, pg. 327

<sup>5</sup> Derrida, Jacques. *Positions*. Chicago, 1981

<sup>6</sup> Grisey, Mary. Statement from artist in personal interview. 11 December 2015

with them. These substances break down the fibres until there are tears, rips and discontinuities. For the artist, the significance of cloth is that it holds this memory; it is embedded within it. The weavings become a relic of the materializing act itself, when something tangible is thrown down into the world, giving form to that which would otherwise have been sensed, buried within, and perhaps lost.

*you burn me*<sup>7</sup>

How can one come to the intangible through the material?<sup>8</sup> How is such a space constructed? In his book *The Sacred and the Profane*, French historian Mircea Eliade describes the apparition of the sacred through something that is otherwise ordinary: “In each case we are confronted by the same mysterious act- the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural 'profane' world.”<sup>9</sup> In *Cloth Dripping*, we enter into a realm whose intentions become comprehensible if we begin to suspend our belief in the structures of logic and language. What is understood lies within the body, in intuition, and within sense experiences. *I want the viewer to learn their own truth.*<sup>10</sup>

The installation’s singing voice (made from a recording from the artist’s own voice) is full of longing. It sings the words “I wait for you now” over and over. It is soft and haunting like the voice of a memory or ghost calling from the depth of a well. *Sound gets inside of you.*<sup>11</sup> Like her hung cloths, the installation’s sonic element is woven; through editing, the line repeats itself, cycling and layering and extending. It echoes and intersperses through the space and resonates through the body, and feels as if it is coming from an interior source. In Ovid's myth, Sappho knew of a superstition that said it was possible to rid herself from her love unharmed, if she jumped into the sea; in her grief, she does so and dies.

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<sup>7</sup> Carson, Anne. *Fragment 38*, pg. 77

<sup>8</sup> Grisey, Mary. Statement from artist in personal interview. 11 December 2015

<sup>9</sup> Eliade, Mircea. Trans. Willard R. Trask. *The Sacred and the Profane*. New York: Harcourt Brace Inc., 1987. Pg. 1

<sup>10</sup> Grisey, Mary. Statement from artist in personal interview. 11 December 2015

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Narrative and myth can extend and express essential parts of human experience. Grisey speaks of storytellers who reference the warp and weft<sup>12</sup> of looms as a metaphor for the coming together of two things, fusing into something greater. Within the enormity of an emotion that is bigger than one person, Grisey points to the power of this sense experience and offers a tangible point of reference. The installation also asks, “what does it mean for the body to be gone?”<sup>13</sup> What is beyond the body when Sappho dies? *Cloth Dripping* is a relic of this story, an interwoven cloth of myth, fiction, transformation and history, echoing through the past to the haunting recesses of the present moment, holding on to the possibility for something to cycle back from loss and decay, into something emerging, forming anew.

*someone will remember us*

*I say*

*even in another time<sup>14</sup>*

– **Mary Ma**

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<sup>12</sup> Warp and weft refers to the vertical and horizontal orientation of thread in fabric made over the loom, where weft (horizontal) is woven through the warp (vertical).

<sup>13</sup> Grisey, Mary. Statement by artist in personal interview. 11 December 2015

<sup>14</sup> Carson, Anne. *Fragment 147*, pg. 297