

HOW TO FIND A BLACK HOLE IN YOUR KITCHEN



*Seating for Four Series: How to Find a Black Hole In Your Kitchen Table; How to Understand Acoustics, How to Drink Tea in the Colonies, How to Fix Broken Toys, How to Know God at the End of the World, 6' X 8' X 27", stoneware, 2008*

I.

My brother's fourth grade science report:

*A black hole happens when a large star dies and becomes as small as a pin,  
but still has the big-star stuff. Its gravity is so great it will suck you in.*

*Even light can't escape.*

Beneath, a drawing:

dark marker bleeding into lined paper, fibers saturated and separating like cloth.

## II.

Two a.m. our mother  
 the kitchen, darkness  
 arms raised expecting  
 to catch the sky.

This is what the end looks like:    sepia tones,  
 fish-like, Vaseline film    with the sheen of  
 metal, sleeping.

Breath. Robe.

A quiet distance at two in the morning.

## III.

*Come.*  
 Standing in the center of the room.    *Shut your*  
*eyes.*  
*Spread your arm* Fingers comb the air.

Feel the cold rising to your skin, heat condensing  
 at your center, the air sucked from your lungs.

These sensations may be slight. A black hole in  
 the kitchen is necessarily small, but no less  
 destructive.

## IV.

From afar, my brother calls.  
 He won't talk,  
*Best not to bother now.*

She speaks of him, fourth  
 grade, the way she had to search  
 his room  
 night after night so that in his  
 sleep a black hole would not



inhale him into darkness and  
nothing.

She has a knowing smile.

V.

When you are too weak to stand, you  
can also find a black hole like this:

Sit where you can rest your head,  
close your eyes, slow your breathing.

Your heart will beat in your  
ears. Your muscles will tense,  
feel gravity pulling from the  
center of your body.

Then it will draw you in.



*Seating for Four Series: How to Find a Black Hole In Your Kitchen 28" X 8" X 24"*, stoneware, 2008



## THE BURGEO GUT

When I was dying  
 You spoke to me in low whisper,  
 a tremble, the shadow of a city sunk  
 beneath a swallowed coastline, in dammed reservoir.  
 Above: the trample of industry, diesel motors, electricity.  
 Below: the ebb and flow of breath and migration.  
 I should have been thinking of survival, flight,  
 but I was enchanted by the sun  
 slivered into shards so small.

You waited.  
 You called.  
 The womb-shaped bay, the strangled umbilical chord  
 choked before it reached the sea. I heard you  
 though your words were only song.  
 It did not matter what they said,  
 the meaning was ours.

Who would have thought we would travel so far  
 to meet an end in shallow water?  
 The majesty of the deep released  
 in last exhale, a curse  
 upon those who took so much,  
 and blessing for a humble shore.

*Seating for Four Series: How to Understand Acoustics — Bugeo Gut detail 11" X 13", slip carved stoneware, 2008*



## HOW TO KNOW GOD AT THE END OF THE WORLD

I.

Wait.

In silence a pulse rises.  
Breath solidifies.  
Feet wash in numbness.

A voice:

*This is how it feels  
to walk on water.*

You will fall;  
You will think you are falling.  
Sky and earth collapse.

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II.

1999, religious cults predict apocalypse—  
the promise of the new millennium.

But I am in Australia—a forgotten land.

Sydney prepares for the Olympics.  
I hope for computer failure to erase student debt.  
Surfers paddle out to sea. The Blue Mountains burn—

a children's game gone-wrong. Oil-  
filled trees erupt. Smoke spreads the  
smell of peppermint and wet fur.

Amid chaos a Canadian tourist vanishes  
Rescuers find a trail in the Outback—  
one sock, the other.

When they discover his  
bible, they predict: he is  
dead.

III.

Posted.

- If lost:            1. Stay still  
2. Preserve energy  
3. Wait

IV.

I had nowhere to go. At an age— too old  
for home, too young to find a way.

I wandered the beach collecting glass shards like seashells,  
poking jellyfish—helpless and deadly.

I should have been looking for jobs.  
I was watching the way shadows flowed  
from the downtown traffic, to the lilt of  
strand, then out to sea.

V.

Things are heavier in the desert.  
The desert opposite the moon—buoyancy an anchor.

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A towel over the head shields the sun.  
Boots covering ankles protect against snakes.  
Keep your eyes away from the sand.  
Breathe through your nose.  
Stay clean.





*How to Find a Black Hole In Your Kitchen Series:  
How to Know God at the End of the World, 13" X 13" X  
27", stoneware, 2008*

Carry only what you need.

## VI.

Recovered, the tourist carried a likeness.  
Desperate. Euphoric. Thin.  
Ghost-like. Made of clay. Hollow.

I thought of a man I'd seen years before  
standing waste-deep in cold water, his  
business suit clinging like a second skin.

The whale, beached in his arms.  
Their breath escapung together—  
steam at the water's surface.

## VII.

I left Australia before the New  
Year, before the end of the world,  
before explosions of fireworks,  
stocking of water, hoarding of food,  
building of shelters, praying to and  
forgetting God.

I thought of the man who  
could not move the beast.  
The beast who could not  
comfort the man.



*Dysfunctional Toy Series: Express Yourself;*  
8" X 5" X 14"; stoneware, moveable wire  
parts, screws, decals; 2005

I.

If the paint scraped away  
leaving an eye without  
definition, or a hinge loosened  
a limb, or "the head popped  
off," these things are readily  
fixed:

Sharpie, paperclip, twist of hand.

If it is something more: translucent  
plastic cracked, hair torn from pin-  
sized follicles; eyes gouged in or  
out—this requires different care.

II.

When my dad remarried he began sending our  
childhood belongings in cardboard boxes softened with  
mold and damp. He included messages: "Here you go,"  
"Thought you might want these," "Hope things are  
great."

He needed to make room, we knew, for his new wife,  
her children in their twenties, but still  
younger than us. They didn't want our toys.

My brother and I did not want them either—childless,  
nomadic, city-dwellers short on space. We left the  
boxes seeping smells of our once-upon-a-time home.

III.

A friend comes to stay.

In tow: a three year-old left by her mother.  
They arrive with the clothes on their backs, a favorite  
stuffed frog, a book about a dinosaur, a princess crown.  
"They let anyone have children," says my  
friend. I present boxes of toys.

IV.

Our father did not forget, but never knew  
which toys were mine, which my brother's.  
In the mail my brother receives the china tea set;

I find the Marvel figurines.



The three year-old cradles  
Wolverine and Spiderman,  
"This is the mommy, this is the daddy." By  
afternoon she has snapped leg from body, an  
amputation below the knee. After years of  
battle-

play, Spidey is bettered by a toddler. In jest my  
brother will smash my teacups, pink flower-  
patterned china in shards. We have long  
abandoned these,

run from our house— before our father kicked  
us out.

Before he remarried.  
Before our mother died.

We are Hansel and Gretel, raised in the woods,  
in the gingerbread house, by things more  
misguided than wicked.

Such a strange delight to be malnourished on  
candy, how jealous was everyone we told, but  
also: the entrapment, slavery, seduction. And  
worse,

the things we did: telling lies, playing tricks,  
pretending to be what we were not, escape  
through that push into that firey oven.  
We emerged from the woods scorched and  
starving.

V.

"Fix it," the three year-old says to me,  
Spiderman in one hand, leg in the other.

Some broken toys cannot be repaired. New  
stories must be told.

A hero is born: one-legged, lighter, impeccable  
balance.

"Look at him," I say. He stands like a bird.  
"Now he can fly."



*Dysfunctional Toy Series: Treatment  
Options; 12" X 16" X 34"; screenprinted  
stoneware, screws, wire, railroad stakes,  
2005*

## VENDOR



In the one-seater at the bar in Deep Ellum, Dallas the vending machine takes the space of sink and toilet combined, offering tampons, condoms, BJ blast, clit ticklin' bunny, pink-opal mini vibrator, purple feather nip clips, But no change.

It makes sense: everything you need for a night-out at a venue occupied by twenty-somethings serving both beer and wine in plastic cups.

So different than the machines in the entrance to the grocery store. Stacked, hip high, holding gumballs, stickers, temporary tattoos, plastic charms in opaque plastic eggs to occupy any two-to-eight year-old for the duration of a shopping list.

In the hotel lobby beside the ice dispenser the machines are in categories: "caffeinated beverages,"  
 "stuff you only eat on vacation,"  
 "smaller versions of things you forgot at home."

The pleasure of dropping coins through the slot, the privilege of selection, the anonymity of the machine, the magic of the correct arm twisting to release.

As much as it is about offering the right thing at the right time— predicting type, purpose, preference, need or desire—it is about being offered anything at all,

being considered,  
being known,

encountered by a stranger who says,  
“I knew you would be here,”  
“I thought you might like  
this,” “You look like you  
could use a good  
\_\_\_\_\_.”



*Carved Urn Series: Enough, 13" X 13"*  
X 31", stoneware. 2003



## HOW TO WALK ON WATER

I.

If it is frozen. Or shallow. Or thick with reeds.

Also, by dispersal of weight over space less than the pressure of surface tension:

Tension (T) = \_\_\_\_\_ Force

(F) \_\_\_\_\_

Length over which

the force acts (L)



II.

Devastating to see the world clearly, when the shore becomes a marsh, eroded, beaten by storm and sea; the piers of plank and metal; the house on the hill—overtaken by mold— never enough for what we needed.

Once we needed next to nothing.

“You eat like birds,” they told us. Proof that we were avian waiting to grow wings.

We played this was our island alone, the dock a concept on the verge of completion, the house learning to grow like a tree.

You believed it wholly.

I believed it also.

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III.

**Gerri-dae** Pronunciation: \ˈjerə,dē\ Phylum: arthropoda Class:

Insecta Order: Hemiptera Suborder: Heteroptera

1. a family of insects with the ability to run atop the water’s surface. Sometimes called water bugs, water striders, pond skaters, water skippers, Jesus bugs.

Always in summer  
                    the water bugs,  
legs outstretched  
                    to corners of a cross, bodies hovering  
above                    still reflections.

This is why  
                    the stones skip, the glass overfills  
without spilling.

Water  
                    not one thing, but  
many things  
                    attracted;

children  
                    holding hands,  
singing,  
                    *Red Rover, Red Rover;*

the brace  
                    before impact,  
the breath                    in unison.

You said, "magic."  
                    You said, "hold your breath."

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IV.  
Some places exist in time rather than space.  
Certain memories are constructed in collaboration.  
In the city the rain hits the only window. My  
apartment floods. The carpet sodden. I think of  
you.

                    You would have loved the outside  
                    flowing in.                    You would have  
imagined                                    we were at  
sea.



You would have claimed  
Half-way above. Half-way  
below. we could live an entire life treading water.

But  
the touch  
so delicate  
to that thin film of surface;

the stone          never settles  
long enough      to sink.

V.  
I could never hold when it mattered,  
your palm clenched in my  
palm. *Red Rover, Red Rover.* I  
feared

the collision; the pain of  
the chain broken so much  
greater than that of release.

I promise, this is not a coffin, but a  
boat; beneath the ground there is a sea  
with islands the shape of clouds racing  
across the water.





*Carved Urn Series: Afraid to Fly*, 12" X 12"  
X 39", stoneware. 2003