

ZZ Kreb's *Omphalos*

I'm thinking of warm dinner rolls...Breasts, bellies, and how butter molds into bread...kneading dough and waiting for it to rise. Chiseling produces a layer of white dust, like all-purpose flour, that falls as the limestone takes form. Every tap makes the block of stone become more sensuous, smooth, and milky.

This is Creation.

ZZ Kreb's stone-carving process employs skills learned from her own mother. Hand-carved limestone in *Omphalos* reminds me of a joyful woman's body: laugh lines, wrinkles, folds of fat or skin. The opaque, chalky stone¹ is like breast milk or sperm. Nourishing, erotic, life-making.

Omphalos, also "the navel," is the center² or origin of the universe in many myths and cosmogonies³. Is the navel not firstly an umbilical cord? A vein providing nourishment that connects a child to its mother?

Stacked stones in *Omphalos* & bulbous forms, hand-carved out of cedar in *Entwined* reminds me of Louis Bourgeois' *Torso: Self-Portrait* and *Camul 1*. I recall Melanie Klein's idea of *part-objects*,⁴ which is a psychoanalytic theory often used to describe artworks with body part-like forms. The *part-object* is based on a child's understanding of our mother's breast as a good-object.

"The earth is often seen as a woman's body" wrote Lucy Lippard in *Overlay*. Can this longing for a mother's breast also be a longing for a connection to the earth/nature⁵ and life itself? Kreb's *Diatom*, is a hand-carved wooden diatomic structure. The piece displays a soft, sanded surface that is disrupted by multiple holes...even navels. In nature, diatoms provide food to higher organisms⁶ and are an essential part of the food chain. Similar to breastmilk, they provide nutrients to other life forms.

ZZ Kreb's *Omphalos* uses the materials of stone, wood, latex, and steel to reflect upon our connection to time, nature, and the human experience. Each work explores the act of art-making as creation, life-making, and life-sustaining. As such, the show weaves together human and non-human timescales through a use of prehistoric stone, part-object forms, and invented organisms or creatures.

Written by Maya VanderSchuit

¹ Limestone, or calcium carbonate, is a sedimentary rock made of fossilized shells and crustaceans. (More [here](#) on California State University's website)

² "A universe comes to birth from its center; it spreads out from a central point that is, as it were, its navel." from *The Sacred and Profane* by Mircea Eliade

³ Cosmogonies is defined by Merriam-Webster as 1) the theory of the origin of the universe 2) the creation or origin of the world or universe. (More [here](#))

⁴ Melanie Klien created an Objects Relation Theory in 1921 that is a variation of psychoanalytic theory. It is discussed in relation to Louis Bourgeois on Tate Modern's [Website](#).

⁵ I am aware of the problematic nature of identifying a woman as nature, as outlined in Shery Ortner's *Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture* (1975). My argument serves to draw connections between the artist, her mother, and the choice of materials and forms.

⁶ This information is paraphrased from an EPA article titled [Indicators. Sediment Diatoms](#).