

**Shanie Tomassini**

Water Whispering Through the Drain



FIG. 1 (Cover)

*Bathtub Drain Rose Window*, 2020. MDF, wine, wood glue, Durham's putty. 45 × 45 × 1.75 in. (114.3 × 114.3 × 4.4 cm). Courtesy of the artist.

FIG. 2 (Above)

*Temperance*, 2019. MDF. 37 × 13.5 × 0.5 in. (94 × 34.3 × 1.3 cm). Courtesy of the artist.

Responding to the Courtyard Gallery architecture—a passageway connecting two wings of a hotel and conference center—Shanie Tomassini engages with the theme of transition as it applies to malleable materials and the transitory nature of experience.

While working with Shanie, I thought about transitions in architecture: how the elastic structure of passageways affects one's movements and how the transitional aspects of architecture—thresholds, gateways, and bridges—signify shifts in consciousness and mark rites of passage. This installation highlights Tomassini's work with reflection and transition, from the welded altar of ceramics and incense press molds (fig. 3) to drawings reproduced in wood (figs. 1, 2, 4). In the transformation from one form to another, Tomassini conjures the uneven or unpredictable phases of life.

Tomassini builds her works in stages, treating endings as new beginnings. She began *Temperance* (2019) as a loosely rendered doodle on a tablet (fig. 2). Then, using a laser cutter, she reproduced the drawing as a scaled-up wood engraving. Lastly, she created a third version of the original drawing by carving around the sharp lines engraved by the machine. As she revised the shape, volume, and scale of the digital drawing to create a "wood drawing," Tomassini considered what survived, what was erased, and what emerged from one part of her process to another.

Playing with the identity of materials, Tomassini toys with the tension between what *Bathtub Drain Rose Window* (2020) and *Floor Drain Web* (2020) are made of and what they represent (figs. 1, 4). She began reflecting on drains while taking a bath, hearing the water pass through the plumbing. Gurgles in the drain signaled the transitory conditions of her awareness. On the gallery wall, the floral and web-like outlines echo the lead bars of stained-glass windows, through which light flows like water. The formal parallels between

the oversized drain covers and stained-glass windows shine through, suggestive of the meditative qualities that first occupied Tomassini's attention in her bath.

If Tomassini's work involves sites of transition, her carvings and incense casts articulate an analogous sense of time. As if eroded by running water, the jagged surfaces of the carvings convey a gradual evolution in the early stages of identity formation. Tomassini's incense casts of cell phones, however, shift abruptly from their former selves to a new one. Once lit, the casts glow hot and bright, releasing their sweet fragrance until settling into a mound of ash. Beyond moving through the life cycle of incense, these virtual gateways have a fleeting intensity akin to the remote connections that our pocket devices bridge.

Sometimes I imagine each work as a type of Janus that provides passage for reflection. Known as a Roman god of transitions who guarded entrances and exits, Janus regularly preceded a list of deities in prayer to open communication with spiritual forces. By the time of Augustus, Romans were accustomed to seeing Janus as two- and four-way monumental arched passageways. From the Imperial perspective, the god was the arch itself, the resident spirit of the awesome power that doors, vaulted arches, and gated passageways enacted in social life and embodied in political theatre.

It is fitting, then, that Tomassini's installation exists in the Courtyard Gallery, itself a passage with two sets of double doors at either end. Approaching her sculpture and installation as a medium of consciousness and a vehicle for movement and change, Tomassini initiates the nuanced transitions between erasure and construction. She positions herself as a conduit through which communicative media pass. For Tomassini, the work is the product of multiple transitions, a means of introspection, and a practice in spiritual connection on a path of self-awareness.

Taylor Bradley (b. 1986, Los Angeles, CA) specializes in modern and contemporary art with a focus on the history of photography and conceptual art. She received her BA in Art History with distinction from Boston University (2008) and earned her MA (2012) and PhD (2019) from The University of Texas at Austin.



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FIG. 3 (Clockwise from Top)

*Candle Holder*, 2019. Clay. 4.5×2.5×2 in. (11.4×6.4×5.1 cm).

*Reality Check (incense alarm clock)*, 2019. Incense press mold, sandalwood, copal, charcoal, gum tragacanth, saw dust. 2.25×4.5×6.5 in. (5.7×11.4×16.5 cm).

*Cup*, 2019. Clay. 5×4×4.5 in. (12.7×10.2×11.4 cm).

*Incense iPhone*, 2019. Incense press mold, sandalwood, copal, charcoal, gum tragacanth. 4.5×2.25×0.5 in. (11.4×5.7×1.3 cm).

Courtesy of the artist.

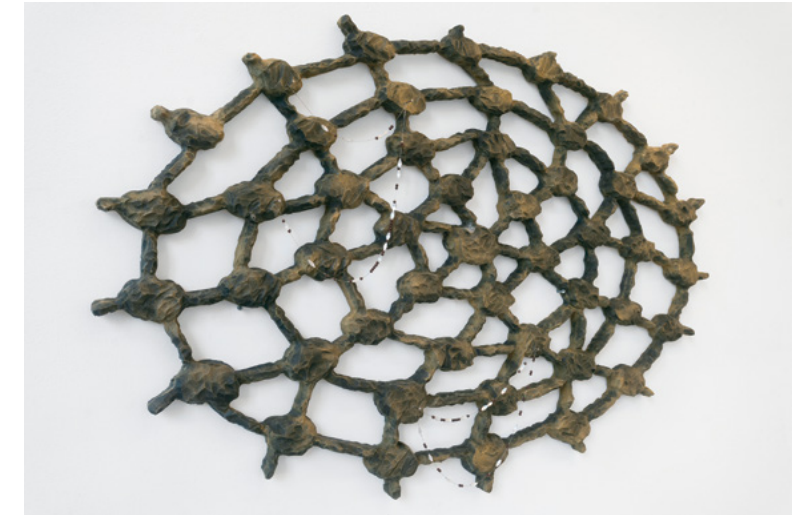


FIG. 4

*Floor Drain Web*, 2020. MDF, water, wood glue, charcoal, nails, metal wire, selenite, red tiger eye. 34×51×3 in. (86.4×129.5×7.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist.

January 23

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### Water Whispering Through the Drain

Shanie Tomassini (b. 1991, Montreal, Québec) received her BA from L'Université du Québec à Montréal (2014) and her MFA from The University of Texas at Austin (2019). Tomassini's work was presented at the Contemporary Art Fair, Quebec (2019); Sweet Pass Sculpture Park, Dallas (2019); UMLAUF Sculpture Garden & Museum, Austin (2018); CIRCA Art Actuel, Montreal (2018); TAP Art Space, Montreal (2018). She is currently preparing an exhibition for the Clark Center in Montreal (2021).

*Shanie Tomassini: Whispering Water Through the Drain is organized by Taylor Bradley, the 2018–19 Visual Arts Center Curatorial Fellow.*



The Courtyard Gallery is located in the AT&T Hotel and Conference Center at The University of Texas at Austin and features artwork from alumni of the Department of Art and Art History in the College of Fine Arts. Exhibitions at the Courtyard Gallery are organized by the Visual Arts Center.

[sites.utexas.edu/courtyard-gallery](https://sites.utexas.edu/courtyard-gallery)