

Secret Work, 2026

Manon Revuelta on Paige Jansen's, *A box for all the things I'll never learn*, 2025

I: October

I look at Paige's show in photographs, marooned in early postpartum. A spiral of pale silk, soft amber light persisting through several gauzy layers. Gossamer-thin, yet a fibre which in itself is strong as steel, and often used in surgical suturing and gauze, mimicking skin. Through the dividing veil of darker silk, a ceramic box, a heavy mass of dried earth. Solid and monolithic, yet so easily smashed into pieces.

Where to write from other than where I am? The stitches have dissolved and given way to soft purple tissue sealing the seam where my son was pulled out of me. I stand on the other side of a true portal: one I cannot go back through, at least not to the same world, as the same person. Days before he was born, I watched the dark shapes of stingrays gliding around the rocks as I walked above the sea. I could barely fathom hauling this being onto dry land and looking, finally, at his face.

There are two lives now, before and after. I am in this one, taking unravelled time and weaving it with clumsy hands. Something resembling a day and night forms, and I wrap it around a being who has no sense of either. Each morning the sun returns after its seemingly eternal absence as though it never left. White rivulets of milk run from my bones to my son's mouth, blood becoming milk becoming blood again.

In these weeks I feel I am in pieces, reassembling constantly around some glacial center I didn't know I possessed. John O'Donohue describes how, when we undergo some massive transformation, we are more prepared for it in our soul than we know:

"That's the secret of change: that there are huge gestations and fermentations going on in us that we are not even aware of; and then sometimes, when we come to a threshold...we'll be able to be different, because secret work has been done in us of which we've had no inkling."

There is a similar unfurling for the tiny silkworm larvae who spun these threads Paige has woven. *Larva*, Latin for *ghost* or *mask*: immature insects were initially named as such because their final form - in this case the silk moth - lurks within them like a hidden spirit. Similarly, that adult version of the insect is by etymological classification an *imago* - from the Latin for *image*, because of the replica it sheds when it molts. *Spiral* and *Threshold* are woven with a sacred material, extruded to cocoon a creature undergoing metamorphosis and shedding - a reminder of the nascent selves within.

These two works use distinct varieties of silk. *Spiral* is woven from that of the cultivated *bombyx mori* silkworm, who is fed a diet of mulberry leaves, while *Threshold* makes apt use of darker *tussah* silk, that of the wild *antheraea* silkworm who dwells in forests and feeds on oak leaves. Moving through the exhibition, a material that has been heavily refined gives way to its unbound form, playing out a tension between control and surrender. And as we arrive at that closed box, a kind of resolution: not containment, but the freedom of allowing some things to remain, as yet and potentially always, unknown.

II: December

I recall finding the glazed husks of cicadas perched everywhere in the early months of my pregnancy like little omens, their backs split by an exit wound. Like the silkworm, they emerge from themselves repeatedly. Here, early December, the air is ablaze with the sound of their wings as my son's small body continues its rapid growth, his eyelids twitching and rippling like the surface of the sea as he sleeps.

III: May

To walk among Paige's pieces feels like a rite which should not be forgone. Luckily, I have the opportunity to view the work in person when it is shown again at Silo 6 many months later. Yves is with me in the carrier and sends squawks and coos into the darkness, noticing his voice echo around the vast concrete space. The cylinder of the silo is a perfect shape to house *Spiral*, and it feels as though we are inside an enormous seashell. Bachelard described the way shells were, for the ancients, a symbol for the body enclosing the soul; a vastness within confines. How this soul is unfurling day by day, ancient and new; how a mother's world shrinks to contain a universe.

As we find our way to the spiral's centre, we double back and retrace our steps to emerge. Renewal so often depends on return: in my efforts to start writing poetry again, I've opened an old word document, sifting through an old flowerbed for seeds. When I glance back across the room, I see another mother is walking inside the spiral's veil, baby on her hip, an uncanny double.

Yves reaches out a hand to touch the floating wall of *Threshold*, and I examine the silk closely. Anni Albers often referred to the woven grid as a matrix, limp threads given strength by warp and weft. In this loose weave, that strength is visible at each entwined intersection. There is a comfort, however, in how easily the structure could also unravel, knowing thread can be rewoven.