

## *Soul Houses*

Rites and rituals in communion with an afterlife belong to all humans. Especially for those who have no belief system around life cycles, or whose belief systems were stripped from them by nefarious religious and political leaders.

When I started making Soul Houses back in 2017, I wasn't sure what they were or why I was compelled to continue making them. The original 4 traveled with me, always close by, displayed on makeshift altars, telling me something. As I begin to, more directly, process delayed grieving in therapy, I understood more.

Later, in 2020, As the pandemic unfolded, our society in the West was confronted with the consequences of a sanitized, death-denying culture that fails the living and those who pass on. Years before all of this, I quite innocently came upon end-of-life doula (aka death doula) work, when I was a practicing yoga teacher. I rarely talk about this as it such tender, private work. These interactions and experiences are out of view of the public and quite sacred; an important part of the life cycle, to assist individuals who are alone or in conflict with their family's belief systems; to support emotionally and spiritually those near the end of life. Might these experiences have informed my work?

I only know this. When I make art, I am processing deeply stacked layers of my own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The artist's intention is a fallacy. I learn over time, through a slow-burn of making, observing, thinking, questioning, and intuiting, what my art is doing and maybe what it means. I continue to discover and learn about my art and life, along with anyone else who engages it. This is its own form of communion and kinship building that is of the highest value and reason to keep making art. I can tell you more about my process and my own experience of the work than I can tell you what it absolutely means or is intended to do, if anything at all. Art is as much a lifetime spiritual practice for me as it is any conventionalist definition that cannot contain it.

*Soul Houses* are some sort of place holder or container for what can be sensed, but not seen or touched. I only named them after I observed and listened to people's reactions and comments about the vessels. Everyone brings their own meaning to the work, and for this, I am grateful.

— April Marten