

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

# CLAUDETTE BLEIJENBERG



**IT'S SAID THAT BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER AND YET WITH SCULPTURE IT IS NOT ONLY THE EYE THAT CAN APPRECIATE BEAUTY, IT'S ALSO ABOUT THE SENSE OF TOUCH; THE FORM, SHAPE, ANGLES, CONTOURS, LINES AND MASS; IT'S THREE DIMENSIONAL. CLAUDETTE BLEIJENBERG SCULPTS WITH THE COURAGE AND CONVICTION OF AN ARTIST WHO INVESTS BOTH HEART AND SOUL IN CREATING. CLAUDETTE'S WORKS ARE OF BOTH PERSONAL AND UNIVERSAL APPEAL; ART TO BE ENJOYED BY BOTH THE CREATOR AND THE COLLECTOR.**

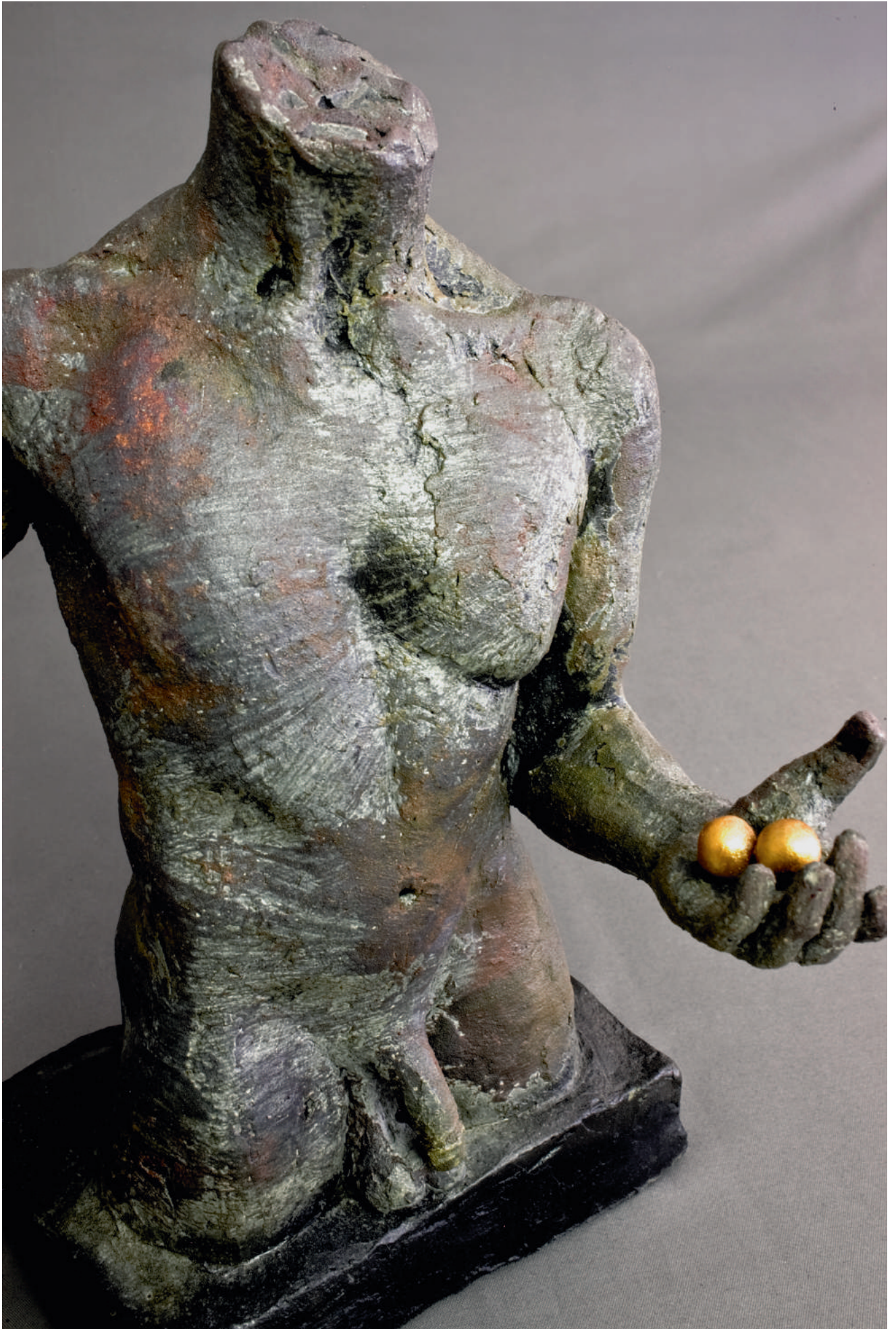
I cannot imagine a life in which I am not sculpting. I love sculpting! I think it is incredibly fun, and I feel an adrenaline high when working on a piece. Often times I will dream about pieces I am working on, and continue to develop pieces in my mind's eye as I go thru my typical work days. To describe myself as an artist is to describe myself as a person because I don't distinguish between the two. Being an artist is how I relate to, and make sense of, the world around me; sculpting gives me a voice to tell my story. I would describe myself as sensitive, thoughtful, introspective, strong willed and reflective. I would also describe myself as observant and detail oriented. I live and work in San Francisco, California and I love it! San Francisco is a vibrant urban environment with a variety of arts and culture that are easily accessible. San Francisco is inspirational with its large community of artists that share ideas and push the boundaries of creativity.

Currently I am representing myself. As I continue to grow I would like to develop a team that could potentially include an agent. I accept commissions, however I have not worked on any to date. I find that when being considered for commissions it is best to

simply talk honestly about my passion for figurative sculpture. In particular, I am passionate about becoming one with a work, completely immersing myself in its story and its spirit, and capturing the essence of the individual. I am passionate about the human form in all its endless unique variations, and exploring the contours of those beautiful forms thru the medium of clay. The lessons that understanding the human form, and the way it expresses everyone's personal tale, are a life long journey that invigorates me.

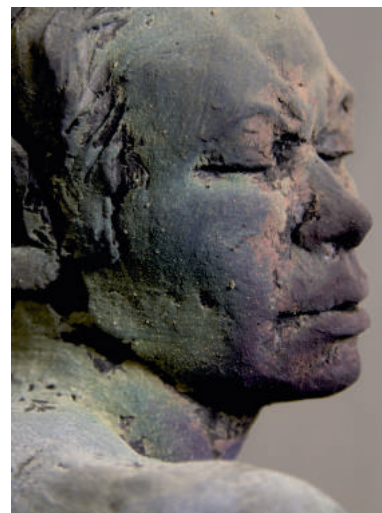
I am an architect by profession. I have been practicing architecture for more than twenty years, licensed in the State of California since 2008. As with most professions, working as an architect has its positive and negative aspects. At its best, I find architecture to be similar to the experience of sculpting. Both architecture and sculpting require thinking in three dimensions, considering structure, themes, light and contrast, texture, molding and shaping environments, and the manner in which people physically relate to and interact with the completed work. I believe that good architecture is an art form. I believe that all arts are interconnected





Balls





### ***Down and Dirty : Ecstasy and Balls***

*Balls is a whimsical statement about man's vanity, every bit as real as any woman's vanity. When working with a live model my inspiration typically comes from the model himself. Either thru his physical form, his spirit and energy, or the way in which he moves and poses for me. In the case of Balls, I was not feeling a connection with him on any level, which initially frustrated me. My first reaction to him was not one of inspiration but more of concern. The model was a man in his early to mid twenties yet his testicles hung very low, much lower than any man of any age I had ever seen. More than wanting to sculpt his physical form, I found myself wanting to create some type of support for his balls in order to alleviate what I thought could be a physical discomfort. I thought the physical discomfort could also be a source of shame for the male ego. For me, this became the story. Balls takes the very essence of his virility, and unabashedly presents it to the world in his outstretched hand. This piece embodies man's universal experience struggling with predetermined images of beauty and masculinity, and the shame we feel when we believe we do not fit those images. Balls is triumphant in his confidence and pride celebrating the very thing that is unique about him, and in so doing reaffirming that the human body is inherently beautiful in all its varied forms.*



Ecstasy



and influence one another. I believe that synergy is important to cultural discourse and advancement. My formal education is in architecture. I have a bachelor's of architecture degree from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. However, I would say my artistic education started as a child at home with my father. My dad was a photographer and had an incredibly artistic mind. I would spend hours, and hours, with my dad following him around and learning by imitating what he did. In those formative years, I was already developing an artistic eye and beginning to find my own artistic voice. I started my academic sculptural education thirteen years ago taking a CCSF continuing education course at San Francisco's Fort Mason. That education has including learning about clay, techniques for working with clay, human anatomy, composition, structure, finishing processes, working with kilns, working with live models, experiencing different medias such as wax, bronze, polyurethane, acrylics, oil paints, hydrocal, mold making techniques and different types of sculpting tools, just to name a few! My sculptural education has

models. Most of my time is spent sculpting in my studio. I will typically work between twenty and forty hours a week on my sculpting business. When I work in my studio I work primarily with live models, from photos and with other reference materials. My first sculpture was a small torso only 6-inches tall. My most recent sculpture is a full figure piece measuring 3 feet by 2 feet tall – it has taken over the entire dining room! Other than the obvious size difference, I think my current works differ from my early pieces because my current works are able to communicate stories that speak to both my personal experience, as well as a universal human experience. As my sculpting skills continue to evolve including my technique, knowledge of anatomy and personal style, I am more able to develop narratives around the works that express human experiences like pain, happiness, love, agony, and ecstasy.

I primarily sculpt using water based clay, often firing work in a kiln and completing the piece with a variety of different mediums such as raku, acrylics, oils, or waxes. I also use water based clay as an intermediary step from which a mold will be taken and a bronze casting made. When I have a piece cast in bronze, the finish will then be an applied patina. I love working in water based clay because of how it feels in my hands.

**"To experience another person that deeply, both physically and psychologically, is to at once understand the uniqueness of someone's individual experience and to be completely and fully human."**

also included learning how to develop my passion into a business including learning how to develop a portfolio, building a website, social media and search engine optimization, managing inventory, accounting, and promoting my work.

I still sculpt at Fort Mason one night a week, working with live

Clay is a primitive material; it comes from the earth and its components are found in each and every living being. Its effect, when I reach into a new bag of clay and begin my work, is visceral. It feels alive to me. Additionally, sculpting in water based clay is inherently an additive process. I find there is a satisfaction in building up a piece,



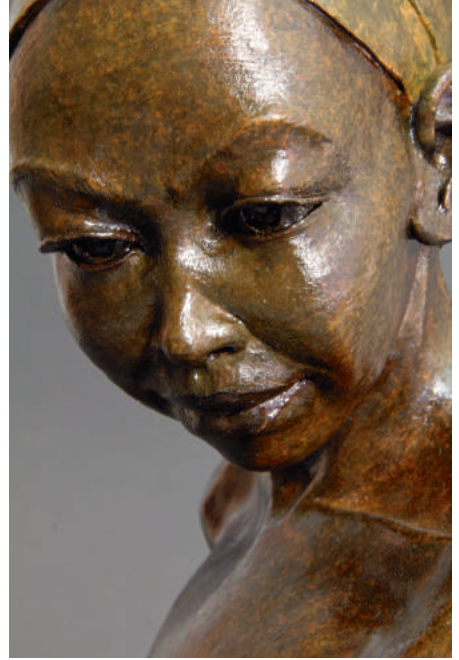
feeling it grow beneath my finger tips, and continuing to mold it as the initial vision is realized. I have a variety of sculpting tools I like to use. My preference is to work with wooden tools.

When I am preparing to sculpt, I am considering the subject matter, the aesthetic, and composition of the piece. I am contemplating the story I would like the piece to communicate and thinking about the technical aspects such as the structure, and the anatomy, of the piece. I plan the steps that are needed to begin the work including any necessary armatures, the workspace, and the tools that will be required, while I continue to visualize the final expression of the work. In beginning a piece, I must slowly get to know it. I must allow the piece to reveal its story and its spirit to me. As my hand and eye move over the contours of the form, I begin to feel how the piece is expressing its essence. A piece will communicate its personal narrative of strength, vulnerability, power and liberation as I build the fullness of the lungs in an inhale, as I carve out the hollow in the nape of the neck, or as I shape the muscles of the back as it arches. In this way I can become one with the piece. The feeling is very intimate, almost sensual, and quite personal. Imagine how it feels to run the hand over the flesh of another human being, to feel the

roundness of the thigh, the buttock, the chest, to massage the arch of a foot; to run the fingertips along the side of another's face and feel their expression, to know the feeling of another person doing the same to ourselves. To experience another person that deeply, both physically and psychologically, is to at once understand the uniqueness of someone's individual experience and to be completely and fully human. For me, sculpting is simultaneously an intimate personal experience, and ubiquitous. Sculpting is both intellectual and intuitive and therefore engages my mind on multiple levels.

Creativity definitely ebbs and flows. When I am in my flow - time can stand still for me. I can work for hours and hours without stopping to eat or sleep. It feels like creativity is feeding my soul, and nothing else is needed. I feel an adrenaline-high, when I am in my creative flow, that is unlike any other feeling I can imagine. When the creativity ebbs, I find it important to be patient with myself. To know that in those down times, my body, my spirit and my mind are still working; they are regenerating and that is an important part of the overall process. In those down times I will study books, go to museums and the theater, read blogs or talk to my partner about sculpture and my work in general. I particularly enjoy going to dance performances, with ballet being near to my heart. I will photograph, write, and continue to develop other aspects of my business. Finding inspiration will always get the creative juices flowing again! My inspiration comes from life experience and studying the master sculptors dating back thru the centuries. Works by Michelangelo, Bernini, Rodin and Camille Claudel never fail to just take my breath away! The myriad of human experiences we have throughout life, and how

**"Life consists of millions of moments suspended in time, each one a part of a larger narrative that tells each person's unique story."**



### **Latest and Greatest : Ibtсам**

*Ibtсам's very presence is inspiring! When Ibtсам is in a room, she commands your attention and holds it with her unique beauty. Her physical forms - the contours of her body and the landscapes they create as the eye travels from her lower back, up to her shoulder blades, along the nap of her neck, then over her collar bone and gently back down to her navel - are alluring and seemingly never ending. With every turn, there is more to discover and so she beckons to you, calling you to come back for more, tempting you to further explore her. Heightening the excitement of this almost instantaneous nonverbal dialogue with Ibtсам is her energy. She has a quiet calm confidence about her that speaks to her inner power and strength. Thru subtle shifts in her pose; the lowering of the chin so as to gaze at the viewer from beneath her brow, the lifting of her hip so as to create a subtle sway in the back, the outward stretching of her arm to gently cup her knee with her hand, she demonstrates this confidence, and flirtatiously invites you to engage with her. Her beauty lies in the way she telegraphs her inner strength and allows your eyes to wander over her like an intimate lover, permitting you passage into her world. It is this coyness, the playful way in which she expresses her self-assuredness and gives you her consent to know and understand her, that is Ibtсам's story.*







### ***The Full Monty : The Morning After***

*The beauty of The Morning After lies in the vulnerability of this instance in time.*

*This piece captures a moment in the journey of a person experiencing one of the steps in the grieving process. Often when we think of beauty, we will think of it in terms of physical attributes; quantifiable or measurable features that are immediately recognizable - things such as proportions, size and color. The Morning After possesses the beauty of voluptuous hips and a waist that dips inward to create an hourglass silhouette. But when my eye draws the curves of her form - when I follow her arms as they wrap around her chest and feel the tension in her stomach as she draws her legs up - I am compelled by the beauty that comes not from her contours, but because I feel her loss. I can relate to her experience of solitude, rejection and despair. Tami tells me her story of longing; the longing to have that person you have given your heart to, your body to, to feel their touch, to feel them responding to you physically, to feel them present by your side. That is what draws me into this piece. It is the haunting beauty of loss that is part of life's rhythm, and the reminder that it is okay to have those dark shadows of life and to not be afraid. Her beauty is in the rawness of the emotion.*



Child's Pose

The Morning After



**“My website, [www.sculpturebyclaudette.com](http://www.sculpturebyclaudette.com), shows samples of my most recent works; all of which have been photographed by myself.”**

those stories are expressed through the human form, is an endless source of inspiration for me. Life consists of millions of moments suspended in time, each one a part of a larger narrative that tells each person's unique story. At the same time, it is our individual narratives that bring us all together because we can all relate to expressions of happiness, anger, shame, sadness, bliss, etc. Capturing those moments in a sculpture captivates me.

I don't have a particular work that I feel more strongly about than any other. All of the works speak to me in different and compelling ways. I feel a connection to all of my works as they all tell an aspect of my own personal story, so I would have to say that my favorite sculpture changes from day to day. Today, my favorite completed work is a piece entitled Child's Pose. One evening I was sitting on my couch in my studio when the vision for the piece popped into my mind's eye. I immediately grabbed some clay, my tools, and literally started to sculpt the piece directly on my bookcase, ultimately damaging the furniture! The sculpture pushed some personal boundaries for me psychologically in what it represented and showed. There is a peaceful serenity to the work, in combination with a vulnerability, that was important to capture for the piece to be successful. The

piece was well received. It won a “special achievement in clay” award at the 2015 Marin County Fair, where the piece was sold.

There are challenges with being a sculptor, and a figurative sculptor in particular. Often times people will comment that figurative sculpting is a “dead art form”, that it is not contemporary, or does not resonate with people in this day and age. That there is nothing new being done or being said through this medium, and therefore it has lost its value. I have had people tell me that sculpting the human form is too representational and therefore too literal. Having an art form that is representational means the viewer is not allowed any room for their own interpretation and it is therefore unappealing. These views of figurative sculpture add to the already complex and challenging business of making a living in the fine arts industry. If I could change one thing about modern day art and life it would absolutely be to make it something that is more valued and respected in our world. I would want artists, and fine arts in particular, to be considered a “valid” profession. I think in order for fine arts to be considered a valid profession it needs to be part of our general education starting at the same time we are learning other fundamental skills in school. I also think art should be a bigger part of





Nurturing

everyday life for everyone, experienced throughout our day to day life in the same way sports and politics are a part of daily life.

There are many times when my inner voice and my artistic eye feel like they are depicting ideas or themes that are not well received, or are making people who come to my work uncomfortable. Often times I find it helpful to hear what other people are experiencing in my work, and find that the criticism is constructive in allowing me to further understand, and refine, my ideas and my vision. Sometimes if a person approaches my work and it makes them feel uncomfortable, I find that is a good thing as it means it is taking the viewer somewhere new within themselves. The work is challenging them and it will encourage me to continue to explore those themes. In the end, I feel this makes my art better because it strengthens my voice and my vision. It helps me to refine my vocabulary. Many times, like most people, I find that I am ultimately my own harshest critic. Success is when I have created a work that makes me feel deeply and truly satisfied; when I have achieved “perfection” in that given moment and can stand back and feel a rush of pride, excitement, passion, and adrenaline. I have always felt that I’ve been successful when I have been honest with myself in my work, maintaining my high standards and fighting for my artistic vision. I don’t believe my definition of success has or will change. Success is an ongoing process. Every day that I create works that are honest to who I am, speak my truths and allow me to feel deep satisfaction in the messages I convey, is a successful day. That measuring stick comes from within and will always provide me with a compass, regardless of any external influences.

My personal path resulted from my own fears about being able to make

a viable living as a fine artist, and my need to better understand who I was as a person in order to trust in my inner voice and artistic vision. My advice, to new sculptors and creatives hoping to achieve success, is to believe in yourself; educate yourself, research your options and find a community and mentors. Don’t be afraid to explore and make mistakes and be confident about your artistic voice and vision. I would also advise any artist who would like to make a living doing their art to approach their art as they would approach any entrepreneurial business. Educate yourself on how to operate and run a business, approach all aspects of your art as you would any other business. Create a business plan, set goals, construct the necessary infrastructure, consider how you would like to promote yourself and what you would like your public image to be. Ensure you have a good team around you, whether it is a professional team or simply a support team. It is important to have a team who can provide objective and sound advice that will help you to grow both artistically and financially. I sculpt almost as a mechanism for survival in order to speak my truths. The fact that my work speaks to people, touches them in some way, is wonderful, but not the primary reason to do what I do. If I am remembered in a long and distant time, I hope that is for something I did to help someone, something that made life and this world better.

