About the Cover

[Photo: Natasha L. Holmes, 'Crump.' From the series 'Ephemera': <http://natashaholmes.com/>].

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The work of photographer and educator Natasha Holmes examines objects in the context of their planned obsolescence. In her 'Ephemera' series, each subject is a quickly discarded material byproduct of mass consumption, made newly arresting as a still life. 'Crump' exemplifies the focus of 'Ephemera' on such detritus. It also raises more questions than it answers.

The unnamed material 'Crump' depicts seems almost to writhe with ambiguity, inviting us to take it in our hands and find some answers. Such proximity would allow us to ascertain its appearance. (Texture? Color? Weight?) We might then determine its previous function. (Did it swaddle a child, wrap a birthday gift, or wipe a runny nose?) Perhaps we, too, could put it to use. (Maybe as tinder for a fire, fabric to cover a decorative pillow, or cloth

through which to strain fresh cheese?) Somehow the stories we tell about things always come back to us: what we need, how we feel, and who we are.

Holmes' image reminds us of the power in material things to stimulate our curiosity and call us to encounter. Likewise, each contributor to 'Contact Zones: Fur, Minerals, Milk, and Other Things' examines a medieval thing, material, or nonhuman agent that enters into dynamic relations with people. Intrinsically linked with medieval stories, identities, and cultures, these ephemera endure.

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