

CIRCLING THE SQUARE

WORDS FROM END OF DAY

GORDON HALL

HESSE FLATOW

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Published on the occasion of
Gordon Hall
END OF DAY

Hesse Flatow
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Preface

Mira Dayal

As an inanimate proxy for the type of worker whose name it shares, the clothes valet was designed to serve a very specific image of “man”: the type who wears a suit to his job at the stock exchange and, at the end of the day, returns home and takes off his shoes, placing them on the lower rung of his clothes valet; takes off his suit, and drapes it on the armature’s wooden shoulders; removes his watch, and hangs it from the object’s protruding metal prongs; and eats his supper and goes to bed until the next morning, when he dresses beside his clothes valet. While you may never have heard of or seen a clothes valet, this description of the labor of both the object and the working man might evoke a different kind of relationship, a digital or robotic assistant programmed to help the working man navigate his day and maintain his image. Both technologies follow a flawed system, anticipating a certain user and the set of needs dictated by their expected way of life.

Gordon Hall’s version of this oddly gendered furniture item is riddled with tiny nails, a laboriously achieved decorative feature that resembles reptilian skin, silvery and shifting in the sunlight. Here it stands, drained of use but suggestive of function, stiff but body-like, in the gallery. These tensions in the clothes valet point to a sense of animacy that threads through the enigmatic works in Hall’s exhibition, which shares the clothes valet’s name: *END OF DAY*. While most of the works hover on the edge of domestic function—a table, a chair, a bench, folded linens—they veer in unexpected directions. The leg of a table becomes the foot of a bird; the line on the floor becomes the seam of some jeans; a letter becomes a step; a symbol becomes a seat. Both recognizable and opaque, the works’ forms have been drawn from the world in a variety of ways, at times retaining the materiality of their sources while elsewhere being remade in pigmented cast concrete or resurfaced with graphite or colored pencil. A shim from a past work is repoured in solid brass, shifting from an unassuming object of support to a sliver of reflected light. These alterations in form and surface hint at imaginative potentials for use, conjuring altered relationships between objects and bodies.

But *END OF DAY* is not only concerned with the action or the echo; it also grapples with the after. After work, what other forms of labor are possible, or desirable? After memory, how do objects from our pasts return? After support, what other function could this object serve? After this object, what relations among bodies are possible? After is expansive; it is not an end but a cycle of iterations. After is also, of course, an homage: After Nauman, here is another approach to the backs of furniture, to the underside of a chair. After the Shakers, here is another approach to “craftsmanship as a form of prayer,” as Hall sees it.

The installation of *END OF DAY* also suggests a kind of after, perhaps after hours, or the static, dreamy space of the afterlife. Just a few objects occupy each room, as if a meeting had been held and not everything had been put away, or as if someone were in the process of cleaning out an apartment. The generous distance between pieces reminds occupants that these are less furniture than sculptures. The most functional-seeming objects rewrite their invitations for use and reintroduce themselves as abstracted and scrambled combinations of colors, textures, patterns, shapes, surfaces, and materials—relatives of the more elusive objects whose capacities remain unknown, or not yet knowable. Take the closed box: Nothing is more reticent, nor more full of possibilities.

This publication was compiled on the occasion of Gordon Hall’s exhibition in the spring of 2021. Sixteen different artists, writers, curators, art historians, and friends of Gordon were each invited to write a text alongside or in response to one of the sixteen sculptures in the gallery, which sometimes share a material or implied functional vocabulary. Together, these texts become a way of collaboratively understanding and expanding the language and relations that might hover around and emerge from these objects. Each contributor read their text aloud during a public virtual event; as at the event, the publication moves through the objects according to their installation in physical space, beginning with the first gallery and progressing through the next two.

I am grateful to Karen Hesse Flatow for initially inviting me to be a part of this project, and to Gordon for sharing such rich works and ideas from which I will continue to learn.

Introduction

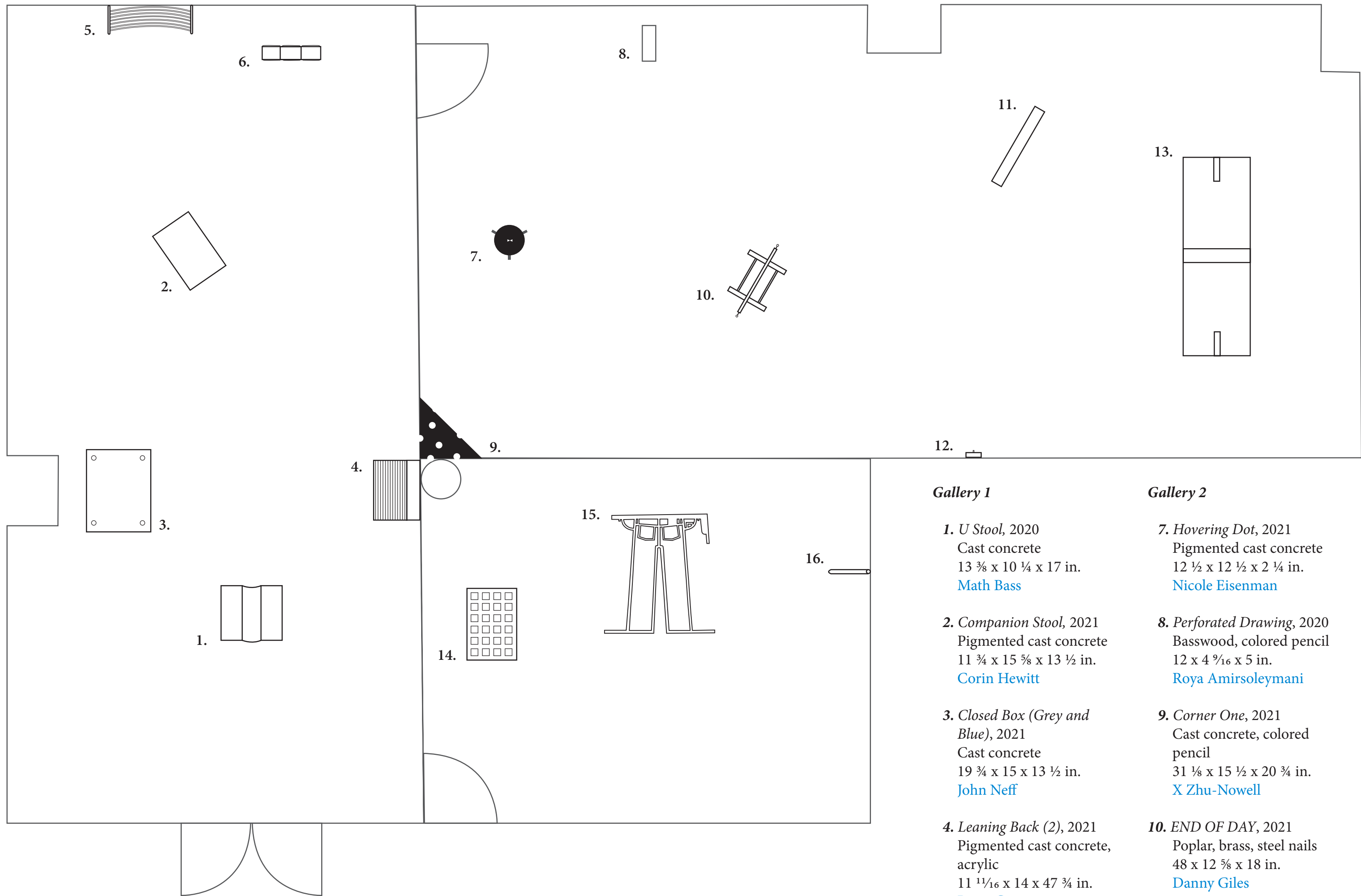
Gordon Hall

Making art is often a solitary activity, but almost every other aspect of doing it involves relationships with people. The sixteen contributors to *Circling the Square: Words from END OF DAY* come from every corner of the social world of my art practice—artists I’ve collaborated with, curators who have made my shows, artists and historians I have taught with or studied with or learned from. Some are among my oldest friends, while others I just met recently. I want to express my deep appreciation to each of them for taking the time to prepare their words, participate in the live event, and include their text in this publication. I also want to thank Karen Hesse Flatow for bringing this exhibition into being and organizing this book project with me. And my deep appreciation to Mira Dayal who has generously collaborated with me on all aspects of *Circling the Square*.

END OF DAY is a show of sculptures, and people are often curious if this or that particular work has a corresponding performance. As in, “Is *this* for a performance? Is *this* for a performance?” The question makes sense, since my sculptures often are performed on, or with, or around, and I think of them as objects of use, even when that use is only proposed and never realized. In this instance, the answer to that question is no — as far as I know, I won’t be arranging public actions with these works for my or other people’s bodies. This is partly in response to the limitations of COVID, but also because for whatever reason, I don’t feel like this show requests it. But, this decision about performance has never felt like a big one to make, and I’ll confess I am sometimes puzzled because this distinction between performance/no performance somehow feels less significant to me than it seems to feel to others. What does it mean for an object to perform? What is the difference between imagining a body doing something and seeing a body doing something? I think that what I’m really after is the sense that sculptures can *do* things—sometimes be used in performance, sometimes lean against a wall, sometimes speak to each other, sometimes propose a way of seeing, conjure a set of feelings, or uncover a distant memory. Are these all not also uses? Can they be thought of as performances?

When I invited the contributors to *Circling the Square* to participate, I described the invitation to them in the following way: “When I make performances in my work, I make that movement in response to my sculptures. I make the objects first and then I watch them and listen to them, trying to hear what they want to happen with our bodies on and around them. I am thinking of these texts the same way. They are not meant to be primarily about the objects, though analysis can certainly play some role. Rather, they use the work as a point of departure for thinking and speaking. You are writing from, or to, or with, or because of your chosen object. What do these sculptures propose?”

In this way, these texts attempt to answer the objects in the same way I often answer them with moving bodies. Sometimes bodies, this time words. The primary difference for me here is the loosening of authorial control necessitated by this invitation, and the generosity of the writers as they bring my work into their worlds. These texts aren’t what I would say in relation to these works, and I heard many of them for the first time at the live event. They reflect the interests and investments of the writers, and are written in a wide variety of voices and literary styles. What they have in common is that they come from focused attention to these objects, as a way of putting them to use.



Gallery 1

- 1.** *U Stool*, 2020
Cast concrete
13 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 17 in.
[Math Bass](#)
- 2.** *Companion Stool*, 2021
Pigmented cast concrete
11 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 15 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.
[Corin Hewitt](#)
- 3.** *Closed Box (Grey and Blue)*, 2021
Cast concrete
19 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 15 x 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.
[John Neff](#)
- 4.** *Leaning Back (2)*, 2021
Pigmented cast concrete, acrylic
11 $1\frac{1}{16}$ x 14 x 47 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.
[Rami George](#)
- 5.** *Leaning Back (1)*, 2021
Hard maple, spray enamel
16 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 5 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 47 in.
[Kahlil Robert Irving](#)
- 6.** *Fold IV*, 2020
Hand-dyed cotton
17 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 6 x 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.
[Mira Dayal](#)

Gallery 2

- 7.** *Hovering Dot*, 2021
Pigmented cast concrete
12 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.
[Nicole Eisenman](#)
- 8.** *Perforated Drawing*, 2020
Basswood, colored pencil
12 x 4 $\frac{9}{16}$ x 5 in.
[Roya Amirsoleymani](#)
- 9.** *Corner One*, 2021
Cast concrete, colored pencil
31 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.
[X Zhu-Nowell](#)
- 10.** *END OF DAY*, 2021
Poplar, brass, steel nails
48 x 12 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 18 in.
[Danny Giles](#)
- 11.** *Shim (The Number of Inches Between Them)*, 2020
Cast brass
22 x 2 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 1 in.
[David J. Getsy](#)
- 12.** *Sash*, 2021
Colored pencil on tracing vellum
6 x 25 x 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.
[Jason Hendrik Hansma](#)
- 13.** *Five Part Bench*, 2021
Pigmented cast concrete
57 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 20 in.
[Nancy Lupo](#)

Gallery 3

- 14.** *Negative Space Box*, 2021
Pigmented cast concrete
19 x 12 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 11 in.
[sidony o'neal](#)
- 15.** *Pants*, 2021
Colored pencil and graphite on tracing vellum
32 $\frac{7}{16}$ x 38 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.
[Katherine Lennard](#)
- 16.** *Graphite Covered Leg*, 2020
Cast concrete, graphite
2 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.
[Andrew Kachel](#)







U Stool, 2020
Pigmented cast concrete
13 ⅜ x 10 ¼ x 17 in.

U Piss

Sitting here, blanked out, a broad flat faced letter, U.

I ran a mile into the carpet, paced around the room, dragged grooves into the linoleum, thinking about you.
Poured myself a tall glass of chilled red wine thinking about you. thinking about you, thinking about you.

U begins the sentence

Unmarked grave

U begins the description
Upscale hotel lobby

U sits plumb bottom still on the cement floor. U sits with a round bottom and flat bisected top solid and see through at once. The groove in between U is a good place to squat and piss, preferably laying ones ass cheeks upon each rectangular surface, I imagine that mine would kind of drool over the sides a bit. your urine needs to bounce back up, and preferably spray your ankles and bare feet.
It would be preferable if you were nude, if you are comfortable being nude in public. And with a full bladder. So that when you piss you really piss.

—*Math Bass*

Companion Stool, 2021
Pigmented cast concrete
11 ¾ x 15 ⅝ x 13 ½ in.

U to n
Mold rolled over
Rolled mold over
Arms to legs
Palms to feet
Curved to slant line

Hieroglyph of a bent snake

Nu Un Nun
14th letter of the Semitic abjads
13th letter of the Greek alphabet
Moveable nu
Ephelcystic nu
Nu rolled un to
the slant

Slant rhymes
Near rhymes, lazy rhymes, off rhymes, oblique rhymes, approximate rhymes, half-rhymes.

Step is a roof
Roof is a pitch
Pitch sheds the snow

Holding pressed feet

Stool, throne, commode, companion
Sliding
off the slant

To find oneself
between two stools.

—*Corin Hewitt*





Closed Box (Grey and Blue), 2021
Pigmented cast concrete, enamel
19 ¾ x 15 x 13 ½ in.



I'm holding a photograph.

Chicago, my apartment, 2019. Nigel asleep in bed, his head just inside the leftmost framing edge, profiled against a white pillowcase. Most of his body is out of frame, but one arm extends horizontally across an expanse of sheet in the middle ground, ending in a limp wrist falling over the edge of the bed, fingers just above a pencil that's fallen on a book resting on the bedside table. The book's title is *Language in Our Brain*.

When Gordon emailed inviting us to choose one of these artworks and write a response, they attached a PDF with images and descriptions of each work. Having just watched a Fredric Jameson lecture when I opened that message, I was immediately drawn to the bench over there — for reasons that extend beyond these requested 500 words. However, when I replied with my preference — late, as usual — I was told that there was a “traffic jam” of requests around the bench. It was gently suggested that I select “one of the boxes” instead.

Looking back at the PDF, I recognized this thing's image as a box, but was flummoxed as to the identity of the other box or boxes. Some time later, it became clear that the tutti-frutti colored latticework object now in gallery two was a second box, although honestly I would call that a crate, or even a cage. Something that encloses or holds, but without the air of mystery that accompanies a proper lidded box.

Speaking of which, Gordon tells me that the inside of my box is pink, although I'll have to take that on faith as I can't verify it visually. There's debate about the etymology of obscene, one suggestion being that it derives from the Greek for “off stage,” extreme behaviors being implied rather than directly represented in Classical theater.

In any case, I took the box I was offered and that I recognized. But what would my text be? For me, it's a tool. Gordon's box — my box — is here. Nigel, the boy in the picture, is also here. He's not in the box; he's in the East Village. I would write about the box without seeing it “in the flesh,” or “in person,” or whatever the appropriate figure of speech is for a cement box. I would experience the artwork up close only while reading my response to it. That's now. This has provided an opportunity to visit Nigel.

I mentioned earlier that Nigel's a boy — which he and I agree is a gender distinct from man — but he's also my wife, and my son. I've had a husband — two, in fact — and discovered that husbands don't work for me. The son part is self-explanatory. One of my favorite YouTubers is Thomas Johnson, a craftsman who refurbishes antique furniture. I learned from him that when you're screwing a top onto a table you have to widen the screw holes laterally, in order to prevent splitting due to differential expansion of the various parts. That's how Nigel and I use the sliding of signification across boy-son-wife; it keeps play in our bond, and prevents us snapping apart.

Sometimes, language has to be loose to work; sometimes, tightness is required. The shape of the box's lid puts me in mind of what my Grandmother called a hassock, or an ottoman, but never a footrest. Four holes, filled with cement tinted blue, are the tufting buttons. Lacan used those buttons, which “prevent a shapeless mass of stuffing from moving too freely about,” to illustrate the need for anchorage points in the flow of signification, where words and meanings are linked, albeit with the loose stitch of the upholsterer's needle. The alternatives would be endless flux or maddening fixity.

—*John Neff*

Leaning Back (2), 2021
Pigmented cast concrete, acrylic
11 ¹¹/₁₆ x 14 x 47 ³/₄ in.

A game of sorts from youth: place your back flat against the wall and slowly slide your legs out. Test how long and how low you can go. Collapse. Repeat. Recently my Zoom yoga has asked for a similar activity: back against the wall, squat and hold. I forget how successful I was in childhood, but I can barely hold the pose today, fire quickly creeping through my thighs. Stand. Shake. Repeat.

For the past decade I've worn the same uniform. It's not particularly interesting or unique—jeans, t-shirt, boots—but it's worked. A creature of habit. Slowly, I began to re-introduce color; a yellow-orange the first to disrupt the blacks, greys, and dark blues. I remember an interview, post-divorce, wherein Björk reveals she's only wearing yellow: a healing color. These golden shirts the closest I have; an orange hue against my body to help lift me up and out.

Revisiting family photos, I find this color ever present. The swami (white, Midwest born and raised) dressed entirely in saffron, blessing me and my family. That man who gave me my middle name, Michael, his own before he took on a spiritual one. Orange: another sacred color.

I see the work I've tasked myself to observe. The only object on that wall. Two forms of concrete resting upon one another, held together by weight, gravity, and choice. Hues of cream and caramel with speckles of neon orange at the edges. A subdued (yet substantial) reflection behind. As hard as I try, I cannot see the fluorescent back, the angle too tight. Instead, I'm offered its trace.

In the gallery I run into old friends, testing my rusty social skills. I'm introduced to Jacob, assistant to Gordon, someone whose hand is part of the work and a necessary double to maneuver the weight. Strangely, J. and I share a history, our stories intertwined in our youths in Boston, J's father present at the death of my first dog, an April Fool's day misfortune, a weighted memory. This family connection shaped through that same swami, ashram, and orange.

Leaning Back (2). An implied body resting in space, overlooking the group. A second, after the first. Nipple height I learn. Washboard (abs) and a bib. A considerable weight, my own in fact—a body much smaller than myself, yet holding the same mass. Forever beholden to one another and to our histories.

—Rami George





Leaning Back (1), 2021
Hard maple, spray enamel
16 ¼ x 5 ⅞ x 47 in.

DOUBLE SHADOW

To build,
To replicate,
Contrast,
Egress.

The inset of industry on the means of evolution.

Evolution is all so living. Living through and the living form.

The hand carries –
The hand stroke –

Key stroke, the need for communication.

Illustration is made by the construction.

Climbing arches, the arched back of the bend on the rear step of the chair.

Hanging close and swinging low.

Materials transform the position. What you see is through a carved screen ≈ mesh.

(Shims and supports)

Posts & Lentil, passages that are graphed using graphite as a moor.

Swivel, swindle, shadow, shock -

Shadows doubled – double shadowed in showers of mixed views of a sun.

DOUBLE SHADOW

—*Kahlil Robert Irving*

Fold IV, 2020
Hand-dyed cotton
17 ½ x 6 x 5 ½ in.

The sun is heavy on the blue horizon when the figure comes home. Hand touches cool metal. Sun warms back. Clothes stick to skin. A chair scrapes the floor, wood on wood, and pulls up closer to the table's dark leg. Gazes meet. One body leans against the wall. One body locates a corner and fits something into it before adding themselves. The sun through the window casts light across the chair back's broad shoulders, first one rung, then the next, then another as it settles itself down. Undulating lines write its form across the wall. The longer the shadows, the greater the entanglements. The figure stretches into the spaces between things, and then unfolds.

Reading now, flipping through the sewn signatures of a cloth-bound book, elongating the vowels, one figure sits while the other reclines. Their eyes adjust to the subtle dimming of the room. One looks at the other's back. The real interest is not in the outside world but in an imagined world, formed within the curve of the head, held downward, to the neck, and along the spine to the torso, and across the lap of the folded or crossed or dangling legs. This negative space can be filled with any number of things—paper, a book, a friend, a lover, an object, or the parallel lines of a table. The sash of a robe wraps around the C of this space and ties it up.

Voices murmur now, and in the shadows, one leg is indiscernible from another. Hand alights on surfaces, surprising itself with contours, protrusions, textures, and interferences. Bodies bend and straighten, extending alternating limbs, moving one across another. On the floor, the clothing is neatly folded, seams aligned and corners tight. One fabric runs into the next. The material is a matrix of crossed Ts and open Os and the form is a volume of the ever-expanding Zs and looping Ps of a woven net. The text is condensed, three columns of tight paragraphs stacked atop one another. Or maybe it is a poem, an accordion of soft and broken and elusive lines. All is cast a deep, violet blue. Specks of red flicker past closed eyes. Tomorrow, everything will be rearranged.

—*Mira Dayal*







Hovering Dot, 2021
Pigmented cast concrete
12 ½ x 12 ½ x 2 ¼ in.

Prop VII. Existence belongs to the nature of substance
-Spinoza

Lowdown dandy/nerd underdog thing
all squashed down and proud and embodying modernism
born to levitate and “zen out” also good for a few kicks

Night sky turtles past a fogged up telescope
A river of stars through salt crusted porthole
Underneath, stillness, check it out, the shadow realm!
Sloughed-off skin cells, pubes, clothing fibers, bacteria, dust mites,
bits of dead bugs, gray hairs, tissue, pollen,
microscopic specks of plastic, paint particles, teeny bits of shit and dirt
signs of time unfixed

2019
Sheldon Eisenman died
The first full moon of spring came particularly close
to earth, it’s pull sucked him right up

2020
I took the rolling plant caddy from my Mother’s basement on Brewster road.
Left: Pool table with cracked slate, wooden shoes, collection of thermoses from each
decade, Trek cross country skis, metal canteen in a fitted canvas tote,
washers, hinges, wire, switches, pliers, keys, fondue set, paint cans, boxes of receipts
and tax forms from the 70’s because “you never know
when you might get audited”!

She would have left that house sooner
but she couldn’t
dementia folding his thinking into strange new shapes

You try cleaning out the detritus at the center of the universe!
52 years there, numb with the shock of it
embarrassed to cry, chins down, we kept busy

What is better than being snug to the ground and stealth
Ya crazy lil’ Roomba! Let’s have Pimms cups
and discuss god’s emotions.
And burrow down into somewhere.

—*Nicole Eisenman*





Perforated Drawing, 2020
Basswood, colored pencil
12 x 4 1/16 x 5 in.

Trypophobia is trending. Perhaps you’ve heard of it. Regardless, as someone who suffers from it, I cannot offer a complete definition, being barely able to bear the images yielded by a cursory online search.

To paraphrase from memory, one who experiences trypophobia is fearful of, or disgusted by, clusters of bumps or holes. Other criteria: closeness, disorderliness, high contrast. En masse, the bumps or holes suggest something diseased: rot, contamination, an infected wound. Even the descriptors of formations—*cluster*, *clump*, *bundle*, *knot*, *nest*—elicit extreme unease.

Trypophobes are easy to tease, but the abrupt and acute revulsion triggered—shivers, shallow breathing, nausea, vomiting, convulsions—can feel utterly unbearable. At worst, it is durational, the offending image becoming branded on the brain while the sick sensation ceaselessly snakes over and into the skin.

With equal distance, or enough space, between bumps or holes, the instinctive reaction might be reversed or relieved. But the most unsettling, the most laborious, the most risky, are those instances or objects that ride the line, when one must negotiate between cautious curiosity and sudden turnoff. To tolerate the shudder, or to turn away. If I stare into, through, for long enough, will it subside? Will I overcome the sick? Will it overcome me? Will it wash over me in waves?

Grief is a sickness, I have learned.
And it comes in waves, I have also learned.
I *learned* because I read it in a book, but also because I am afflicted.
Grief is a sickness I have learned.

Grief involves holes. Not only the emo hole in your emo heart, but orifices.

Wet, lonely, messy *orifices*.

There are the tear ducts (overplayed), wetting and salting the nasal cavity and the eyeballs. If the eyeballs are removed, do their sockets become orifices?¹

In any case, the eyeballs are covered by eyelids, which close from early morning to late afternoon. You wish they’d stay shut forever, but once open, they remain so til sunrise.

There is the mouth, filled with oceans. The one in the dream that can’t scream. The one Wikipedia says is for *eating*, *breathing*, and *speech*. Thus, the one that stops working.

There is my pussy, the one that works just fine. More than fine. All the time.

There are my nipples. See above.

There is the anus, both sex and stomach.

The navel doesn’t count, but it’s cute.

There are more. There are others.

Each one lonely. Each one alone.

. . .

But *perforations*, they like company. They have good boundaries. The proximity feels nice. Like the concurrent continuation and completion of a period. Like ellipses. Like room to breathe.

Perforated Drawing is heavy, but liftable, a basswood brick hand-colored with warm, red-orange pencil. *Pale Vermilion*, to be precise. A perfectly punctured glow. It is placed too close to a wall, with space too narrow to move through, and just enough room to breathe.

—*Roya Amirsoleymani*

1. When someone dies, and their eyes are donated to medical research, the family receives a letter thanking them for contributing to the advancement of science. I learned that in September.

Corner One, 2021
Cast concrete, colored pencil
31 ⅛ x 15 ½ x 20 ¾ in.

“I hiss yes I hiss very ancient things”

噏噏

噏噏

噏噏

Cha-Cha-Cha Cha-Cha-Cha
Click

Click
Click

Dap
Tap
Dap

撲通撲通

嘎吱嘎吱

際際際際際際際際際際

Xxxxxxxxxx

蕭蕭

嘎然
咩
咩

Oooooooooooooouch

Kaboom

o

shuffle
shuffle
shuffle
shuffle
shuffle

FZZZZZZZZZ

“A whole lot of forgotten things
A whole lot of dreamed things”

—X Zhu-Nowell





END OF DAY, 2021
Poplar, brass, steel nails
48 x 12 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 18 in.

END OF DAY stands like a hollowed out surrogate human body, casually guarding its various neighbors and companions in the gallery space. The form is made of slender pieces of poplar that are cut, carved, and composed into a neat anthropomorphic framework. This recreation of an antique clothing valet is studded with hundreds of evenly spaced upholstery tacks. This surface adornment is both careful and obsessive, covering almost every inch of the form, save for the very top. As with Gordon's practice at large, I approach this object through my own particular embodiments and references and use them to guide me through the work. When looking at and thinking about this particular piece, I'm reminded of two quite divergent objects.

The clothing valet is an object made to serve one's body, holding a suit, shoes, and other personal effects while dressing or undressing. Valets are clearly named for their human counterparts - the original valets; man-servants to royalty, statesmen and the upper classes of Europe. Valets saw to the needs of their masters, dressing them, drawing their baths, and even organizing the household finances. They facilitated the smooth functionings of daily life.

The tradition of the valet continued in the United States. White House valets have served every US president since George Washington, whose own enslaved valet, William Lee, is often depicted near Washington in paintings. Valets existed as part of the greater collective of enslaved laborers who were forced to work in countless homes and plantations. Enslaved valets to plantation aristocracy often held close intimate positions in the master's family. In the American context, the clothing valet could be seen as both a vague call back to the times of royal dress and as a haunting vestige of American slavery, transmuting the body in servitude through abstraction into a mute object.

The other object that comes to mind is really a body. Minkisi (plural for N'kisi) are power figures of Central Africa used in ritual spiritual practice to serve a multitude of social and spiritual uses. An English word for N'kisi could be 'spirit', as the N'kisi is regarded as alive in its own right. When used by the Nganga to invoke supernatural forces, the N'kisi is capable of curing or causing illness and repairing social problems within a community. Minkisi are often carved in the shape of a human or animal figure, filled with medicines, and covered in metal nails, each marking the resolution of a dispute or agreement. N'kisi power figures and other African artifacts influenced the development of European Modernism, inspiring Dadaism and movements in abstraction. Drawing from the conceptualism of African art, artists like Duchamp allegorized the agential capacity of these ritual objects through works that played on the performative signification of language.

The N'kisi and the valet share a common place in Blackness. The structural imposition of servitude that renders humans into utilitarian objects coexists beside the artistic and spiritual force of the power figure. Through what I bring to this object, I can regard it as a proposition for how to hold these narratives together, not to reconcile but to feel and know through them.

—*Danny Giles*

Shim (The Number of Inches Between Them), 2020

Cast brass

22 x 2 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 1 in.

I remember being taught as a child that there are six simple machines: the wedge, the wheel and axle, the pulley, the screw, the lever, and the inclined plane. The last of these, inclined planes, charge other objects with energy. Inclined planes are a way to work against the downward pull of the Earth, and they both elevate other objects and put them in a position to test gravity by falling. Shims are proletarian inclined planes that aren't allowed to offer this pathway to ascendance or descent. They exist for others—acted upon rather than acting themselves. They hold; they steady; they support; they anchor. Neither is the shim a wedge, used to force apart. Instead, shims keep things together, holding steady those objects that rest on their backs as they hug the floor.

This shim, larger than most, adopts the shape and scale one of the supports for the sculpture and performance *The Number of Inches Between Them*. I saw that performance but didn't see the shim then. It did its unsung job by bracing Gordon's reconstruction of a sculpture by Dennis Croteau. Originally an outdoor bench on uneven ground, the sculpture was remade and relocated inside to a regular floor. The shim held steady the unorthodox cast concrete bench so that performers' bodies could move above, over, and around it. Its invisible labor made it all possible.

Now in cast brass, this outsized shim is freed from its supporting role. Shims expect to be squeezed; and their task is to push downwards and upwards in equal measure. This sculpture, instead, has retired from that labor. No longer caught between pressures from above and below, this tiny unburdened Atlas stands on its own. It has done enough work, and it is recalcitrant in its newfound uselessness. It sometimes dreams that it might have been an inclined plane, even though its low-slung right triangle of a profile offers only a short path to ascent, all that its terminal height allows. But this shim doesn't need to do more than remind you that it could, like any other inclined plane, still stand against gravity's pull. No longer laboring for others, it now simply rests.

—David J. Getsy



Sash, 2021
Colored pencil on tracing vellum
6 x 25 x 5 ¼ in.

A sash cinches with, never for your body
A sash is elemental, companion at our start
there at the first moment we sang, “O Carotid of Garments
you are pre-garment, pre-worn
you are before the pre-fixed
you are knot”

For millennia we have come away from our clothing
For millennia we have tied together our clothing
The sash is love, as love both ties
and unties
us

A sash prides with us outwardly, folding into the very who we are
to each other
A who that can signal conquest, or a who that might drape to the
floor
fingers tenderly in the loops of a lover’s bathrobe
gradational pleasures, that softest sound
of fabric and memory

—*Jason Hendrik Hansma*





Five Part Bench, 2021
Pigmented cast concrete
57 ½ x 17 ½ x 20 in.

Tbilisi, Thursday April 8, 2021

I walked back from dinner with a dead phone right in time for curfew at 9. Won’s show was more goth than I was expecting and thick and spooky and somehow makes sense here in a way I can’t imagine somewhere else. It’s not just the theatricality. It also made me realize there are no helicopters here. I woke up at 3 and with no possibility of going back to sleep I wagered that police wouldn’t be in the quick space of half a block and went out and bought Aqua Blue’s.

I sat in the garden on level -1 and really felt the confines of the cage. I thought about the riot the other night since earlier Øhad been thanking me for my instagram coverage. And I stand by what I was trying to say to ♀ the night he came back from the skiing trip. That it should feel less like a band of losing soccer fans cursing their opposition and somehow more like a push towards collective liberation and fiesta forever. Why not? Especially when it intersects with our abjection. So for example I was into the eggs. There are still pieces of broken shells and dried slime on the sill outside of my window which feels completely appropriate.

And I feel it, the industrial complexness of the printing house-cum-hotel and restaurant and bar and fashion boutique and gift shop and offices and studios and empty space and the remnants of the casino I never saw. Everything is closed now, everyone in their cells. Unless of course you are under a different set of rules. Unless maybe you have an imagination.

I went upstairs, ♂messed me about her friend who is not alive anymore. I’m not sure if it’s recent news or not. The cause of death had something to do with these Chinese drugs which are apparently so great but I’ve never heard about them. She sent me the track we listened to in bed a couple of weeks ago. The English is really touching and somehow rounded; he’s singing about seeing a bunch of his friends dancing on the beach and how they are going to move to the left and to the right and never get old and never die. The video clip is 3 min and 49 seconds. I listened to it on repeat for at least two hours and bounced around my Rooms. At 5 I went out and walked on the freeway stacks that surround the heroes monument like I was some kind of Tom Cruise in Vanilla Sky, except that at this point it’s still completely night and we aren’t in heaven for sure.

On the periphery of the freeway, there is a truly random green grass park that is doubly green because it is illuminated somehow with green lighting like Gatorade. I sat on a bench and thought about what more there might be to say about park benches or just benches in general. I thought about Gordon and our shared love for this tender and brutal space of pause and punctuation.

I remember the magical highland townlet with the towers, both dwelling and defense mechanism and how I met ♀ and how later he yoked up the belt of my parka and told me that he wanted to hurt me. The directness as a point of departure was itself liberating. At least something was clear. And If I could talk about that gesture somehow as it could relate to civic cruelty and also a kind of tenderness I would do that.

I walked to this statue on the other side of the mid-City which kind of reminds me of ♂. The statue, erected in the year 1999, also bears a striking resemblance to the guy in Jacques Rivette’s *Duelle* with this kind of nose that’s uncommon although maybe it depends on your point of departure. Ok, he’s a composite of these characters maybe but also several others in proximity and in this daydream maybe I melted. The sun came up, I went back to the hotel, got in the bath and then later, in bed.

♂ sends me a message at some more normal time and we go back and forth for the rest of the day. Reluctantly, I told him the whole story piece by piece at first omitting specifics and then not. I needed to try to reconstruct what happened in order to see if there was any meaning at all.

I say:

I think telling someone that I love them is about being afraid I could be physically hurt or it’s some kind of quasi political fantasy/delusion

(cont.)

It's like I'm trying to be cute and somewhat pathetic like a shih tzu

As a way to preemptively beg for mercy should something go wrong

ø says:

You are like punishing them, when you say smth like that

Love, you know, it means so much, in our culture, with lots of responsibilities, that starts with self-satisfaction, but it's all about torture, as fassbinder would say

At one point before it gets dark I see him in the distance from outside of my window and we wave and it's truly cute.

I descend the stairs to pee and get a coffee and of course I see Count Dracula at the restaurant and we start a casual chat about Georgian men as a category both cliché and not. This is inspired mostly because ø came to visit earlier. She wanted to show me some of her new paintings which deals, in part, with this subject. And I was trying to talk to her like I might know something but also I don't know.

I turn to leave but then see ∫ and ∫ and sit down again. ∫ and I start to talk a bit about the riot, I say my line again, still standing by, but the discussion will have to be resumed later when we can actually get into it. She has thoughts. We also went over some of our earlier back and forth around the issue of the swamp and swampy art and swampy fashion and other swampy things generally. To say that I want to write a defense already sounds like it's coming from the sunken place so it's not that. ∫ said he's not feeling good. He has access to other kinds of people. Not just like who is here here here all of the time. And they don't have anything, no money for bread.

I wake up and look through my chat history and it looks like I made several calls last night. No one appears to have picked up any of these lines out.

—*Nancy Lupo*







Negative Space Box, 2021
Pigmented cast concrete
19 x 12 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 11 in.

<< I draw rectangles as big as I like. >> Or so the Alberti instruction might begin. A reference to dominant space, and yet certainly not the *end* of it. We are used to this by now. The assertion of a certain logic, the sequential application of materials (those Earth elements over time) toward some ends. To deny those ends which so often act against life is to live knowing the name of so many things which dominate you so that you can dominate me so that I may dominate you. And what of the application of logic itself?

The end of a sequence. open == Negative_Space:

One of the formal definitions of their convergence, as in the convergence of mathematical sequences, describes a place where the so called tail *end* of the sequence might live after a while. The construction of this place is procedural but inspired, leaving much for the intuition required for analysis. In the case of a complex sequence, a sequence of expressions that can be written in terms of two real numbers and an imaginary number, the desired place for convergence is an “open disc” with a super small radius.

Because we can make the radius of the disc as small or large as we like, we can allow for more or less elements of the sequence to gather at the end of the sequence.

Because it excludes, we can say our open disc is more precisely a bespoke disc. With this in mind, whence our open box?

In the tradition of mathematics that originates in the bespoke and persists in the colonial, when speaking of parabola, it is customary to invoke *the* parabola. That is, there is only one, no matter how or where you slice the cone—there it is, before it has had a chance to decide which way is open, which way is up, which way is out. When I see an image of Negative Space Box, I think about the limits of Alberti’s procedure and of the parabola itself. It is an open box working toward a de-renaissance-ing of the thing. Or maybe this is the body finally integrating shadow. It’s real and not so continuous depending on who you ask. It is pigmented, but sliced. Tonal in a way that suggests a lid, or a lock, or the right place to detach one part from another. Remember the Pokéball? I am late to seeing that, in this case, a cage also shares it’s typology with an open field. In context, we may decide to reject the idea that we are meant to choose a cage, and now what? Our own bespoke disc. It, unlike the parabola, may be constructed and reconstructed with new feeling and reference. It asks us to speak to—and importantly place—the end(s) of dominance, the end(s) of capital, the end(s) of caste.

Our open boxes are bespoke. They whisper << I make rectangles as dense and complex as I like. >>

—*sidony o’neal*

Pants, 2021
Colored pencil and graphite on tracing vellum
32 7/16 x 38 1/4 in

Unpacking the box stored until recently on the floor of the left-hand side of the hall closet down the upstairs hall near but not in the bathroom of the Ohio house where I haven't lived in twenty years, until recently.

Electric blue corduroy overalls, wales flattened at the knees.

Three makeshift bibs made from washcloths and bias tape, each is stained with indeterminate smudges whose sources are long decayed.

Pants made of red woven cotton with small white flecks, waistband and ankle elastics shot to breaking fibers.

Two-piece pajamas covered in cream-skinned mid-century baseball players printed on a synthetic that would melt into a crust on sensitive skin if they got anywhere near a fire.

Two homemade nightgowns in pilling polyester flannel printed with neon stars.

A small white t-shirt decorated with a couple of off-center scribbles in fading purple and green marker.

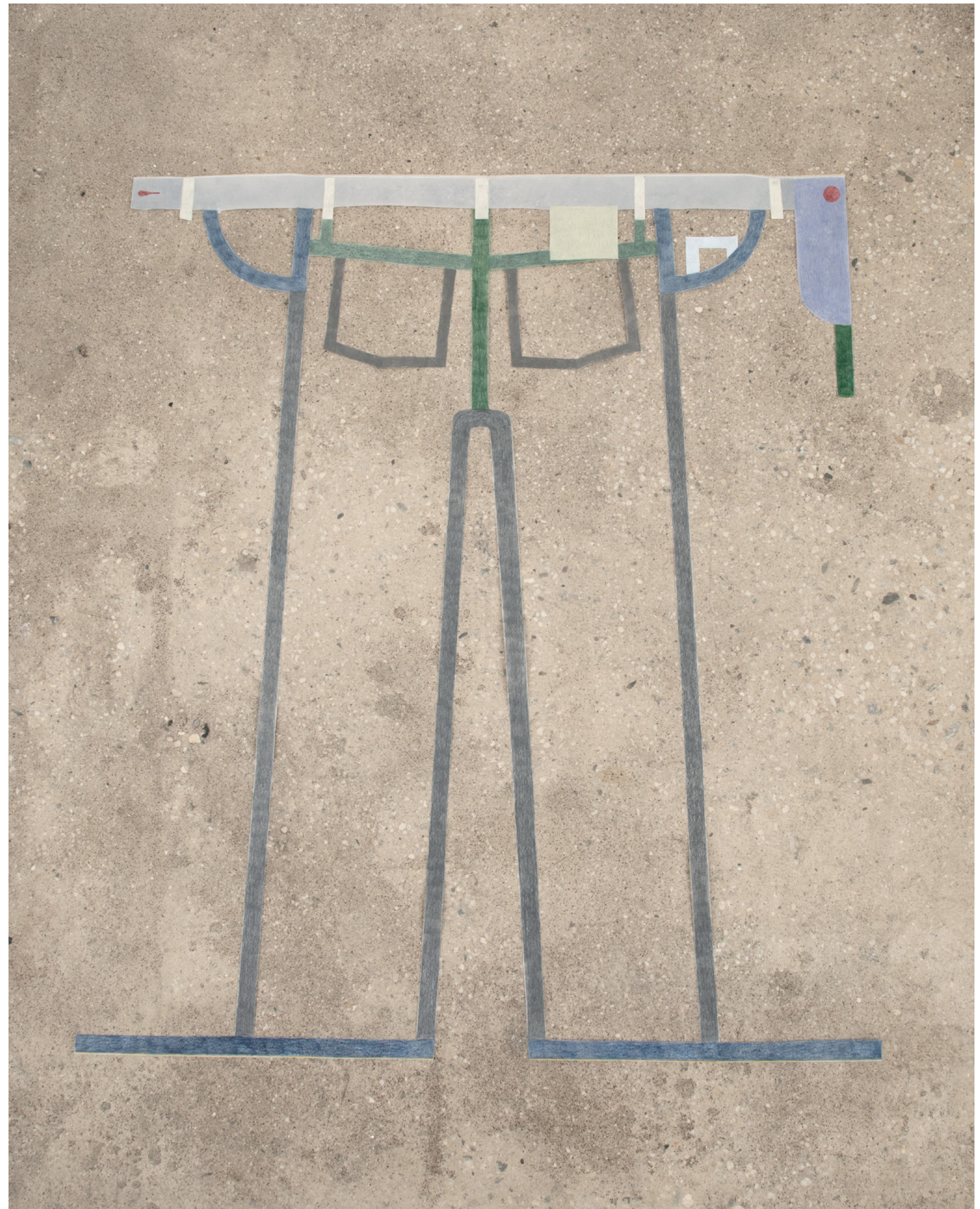
Scratchy sweaters, saggy shorts, holey cloth diapers, and unmatched socks. Some other stuff I don't recognize.

No bodies, though all these garments all evidence collaborations carried out in thread and mud and carpet abrasions and food and shit and spit and sweat and moth bites. Viewed in this context, they are sweet and sad for the way they have registered the movements of their users, some dead some old, certainly none of whom were ever this tiny. Some of these clothes end up going on my son, impossibly tiny only for a moment himself, others go back in the box—pilled velour sweatshirts that should be thrown away, but won't until the oak in the yard falls on the house and smashes the closet to bits and the worms crawl out of the bin in the garage and eat up all that organic matter. Us included. That was dramatic. But it's hard to talk about old clothes without some too-sweet note of longing wafting in. Their abstracted shapes mark spaces that can make us miss the bodies we once had, or thought we would have eventually, or those we no longer get to hold.

Lingering in sentiment can erase the work evidenced in this makeshift archive: the sweaty business of producing raw materials, spinning fibers, weaving yardage, making patterns, cutting pieces, stitching garments together, of shipping and selling and buying and washing. Some of these processes are now frequently automated, though not as much as you might think. In much of the world—notably India and Brazil—cotton is still picked by hand; for all the automation of the sewing machine, most are still operated by humans breathing microscopic fragments of thread. Making clothes is a visceral process, stitching different kinds of labor together into a thing that could persist beyond the bodies whose work it evidences. In this persistence all that work disappears, and all we are left with are its often-enigmatic traces: crooked seams, mysterious stains, and corduroy wales rubbed flat. We can read them, but we're usually wrong. Clothes without bodies are like that.

Last week my son leaned too far to the side of his highchair and fell. Before the purple welt developed beneath his eye, before he started to flail and yell, his skin dissolved into the surface of the floor. For just a fraction of a second, he was only visible as a series of dark shapes. Anyway, that mass of labor and adoration and violence quickly resolved into a sobbing pile of clothing he was already outgrowing.

—Katherine Lennard





Graphite Covered Leg, 2020
Cast concrete, graphite
2 ½ x 8 ½ x 27 ½ in.

A holding on

*“There it was, in a white room, all by itself, it didn’t need company, it didn’t need anything. Sitting on the floor, ever so lightly. A new landscape, a possible horizon, a place of rest and absolute beauty. Waiting for the right viewer willing and needing to be moved [...] That gesture was all we needed to rest, to think about the possibility of change. This showed the innate ability of an artist proposing to make this place a better place.”*¹

I spend most days thinking about Felix Gonzalez-Torres, the artist who wrote this. In the late 80s and early 90s he made work that conjured a certain potential for immortality through perpetual openness to change. (For one thing.) Change being the only thing we can count on, always. There’s a utopian dimension to this thought, but it also moves through fear. And it entails a shifting form of dependency:

*“The language of these pieces depends, to a large degree, on the fact that they get seen and read in art contexts.”*²

I want to advocate for art that holds open space for complication, art that contradicts itself on purpose. And I want to connect the notion of dependency on context with that work in the white room all by itself, that didn’t need company, didn’t need anything. What I want to hold onto is a dependency beyond need. An argument for context that resists the coercive force of any *particular* context. Art made in this mold has something to give, and its gift is not one-directional. If you accept it, you affect it. You exceed exchange.

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One understanding of the claw-and-ball motif involves a protection of something ephemeral, like wisdom. Another is that it represents a crane holding onto a stone, leg pulled up toward her body, while she stands on the other leg and guards her nest. If she dozes off, she drops the stone and quickly awakens. A scene of anxiety, marked by the tenacity of the hold. But it’s also motivated by a gentler, metaphoric holding – a detached but embodied form of care.

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Two other artists I think about a lot, Constantina Zavitsanos and Park McArthur, make work that engages the immeasurable entanglements of social life. (For one thing.) A few years ago they collaborated on writing scores for acts of care:

*“Feel the expectation of embodiment.
Reassure each other.
Accept help from others.
[...]
Hold onto someone holding you.
Hold on to someone holding onto you.”*³

In being held, and holding on to being held, what do we let go of? When you score these acts, or sculpt them, or experience them – What is protected? What is made possible? What is opened up and accessed in new ways?

o

One gift of Gordon’s work is its effort to convey that which resists representation. And one thing that is traced, described, archived, alluded to – maybe even memorialized – in a cast concrete and graphite sculpture of a table leg with a claw-and-ball foot, is an act of care. A holding on.

—Andrew Kachel

1. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “The Gold Field.” Originally published in: *Earths Grow Thick: Works after Emily Dickenson* by Roni Horn. Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, The Ohio State University, 1996: 65-69.
2. (But which art contexts?) Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Tim Rollins, “Interview by Tim Rollins.” *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*. Edited by Bill Bartman. New York: Art Resources Transfer, Inc., 1993: 5-31.
3. Park McArthur and Constantina Zavitsanos, “Other forms of conviviality.” Originally published in: *Women & Performance*, October 30, 2013.

Math Bass is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice spans across painting, performance, sculpture, and video. Recent solo exhibitions include Susanne Vielmetter, Los Angeles; Various Small Fires, Seoul; Tanya Leighton, Berlin; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Mary Boone Gallery, New York; The Jewish Museum, New York; Yuz Museum, Shanghai; and MoMA PS1, New York.

Corin Hewitt's installations, performances, sculptures, photographs, and videos investigate relationships within architecture and domestic life. Solo exhibitions of Hewitt's work include Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; MOCA Cleveland; ICA VCU, Richmond; the Atlanta Contemporary Arts Center, and the Seattle Museum of Art, among others venues.

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David J. Getsy is an art historian who writes about the ways that sculpture and performance can figure relations. His newest book, *Queer Behavior: Scott Burton and Performance*, is forthcoming from University of Chicago Press in 2022.

Nancy Lupo is an artist currently based in Tbilisi, Georgia who makes sculptures, drawings, videos and writing. Recent solo exhibitions include The Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego; Kristina Kite Gallery, Los Angeles; and Dawid Radziszewski, Warsaw. Her first public artwork was presented in the fall of 2019 in Pershing Square in downtown Los Angeles.

sidony o'neal is an artist and writer based in Portland, Oregon. Their work has been presented at Sculpture Center, New York; Fourteen30 Contemporary, Portland; and Institute for New Connotative Action, Portland. Performances as a part of non-band DEAD THOROUGHbred have been presented at Portland Institute for Contemporary Art and Kunstverein Düsseldorf.

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Circling the Square: Words from END OF DAY
Co-edited and designed by Gordon Hall and Mira Dayal

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