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CHICAGO

Gordon Hall

DOCUMENT
1709 West Chicago avenue
November 8–December 21, 2019

"Can I make sculptures that are dances?" Gordon Hall asked in a 2013 text. The sculptures in "Uselessness"—nine simplified forms rigorously fashioned from cast concrete, poplar, and carved brick—answer affirmatively. In an exhibition earlier this year at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, for which these works were commissioned, each sculpture correlated with a performance. Some called for physical contact between the performer and the object—for example, the artist perched in the carved space of *Sitting (Brick Object) (III)* (all works 2019). Others were more associative, as in the slow melt of an ice block shaped like a soda can in oblique response to *Shim (White)*, a low, slanted form embellished with eight raised lines and a round hole. Such interactions display Hall's politics of abstraction, contending that objects can model more generous ways for humans to encounter and care for one another. While, for the artist, these object lessons might most urgently pertain to the politics of gender, their sculptures insist on openness; viewers looking for a clear position on

current events will be frustrated. Part of the artist's program is to produce a more generous political future by welcoming forms that evade existing categories.

In "Uselessness," Hall's first solo commercial gallery exhibition in Chicago, the artist does not perform. It is tempting to frame Hall's absence as an abdication, a cynical abandonment of these sculptures to their commercial fates. Yet this decision also reflects the ripening of their philosophy of objecthood, which is traceable in *OVER-BELIEFS* (2019), a collection of the artist's writings published by PICA and available at Document. Refusing to perform, Hall highlights the power of objects with seemingly ambiguous functions to evoke movement and elicit specific political effects, even when separated from their maker or the performing body. Hall has entrusted viewers with their objects, and trusts the objects to solicit care from us.

— *Brian Leahy*

SHARE

REVIEWS

An Intimate Dance of Objects: Gordon Hall

Share

by Lucy Cotter

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

“Through and Through and Through” at Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, 2019
Courtesy: Portland Institute for Contemporary Art and Evan La Londe

New York–based artist Gordon Hall’s new exhibition *THROUGH AND THROUGH AND THROUGH,* on view at PICA (Portland Institute for Contemporary Art), offers an encounter with objects that invites us to reexperience the (gendered) body.

Gordon Hall's sculptures are small delicacies, placed ritualistically in space like carefully punctuated words on a page. To encounter *THROUGH AND THROUGH AND THROUGH* without prior knowledge is to be pleasantly surprised by an invitation to be intimate. This overture bypasses thought and nestles itself comfortably in the elongated curve of an arched foot, the cavern of an armpit, or the crevice between two buttocks. Although presented in the rational object-derived language of abstraction, Hall's work is intensely sensual, with its sherbet-colored palette and softer-edged vocabulary of serious play. It speaks back to Minimalist sculpture in ways that overlook the commercial reification of the interim period, embracing instead its early phenomenological dreaming. Their oeuvre dreams further, however, asking questions that speak to the transforming corporeal imaginaries of the present moment: If an object holds a body and a body is not a thing, how might we move or be still together in the same space? Are you curious about my being? Can I imagine you to be everything you are, with no boundaries? Can you see me, too, as an open-ended possibility?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

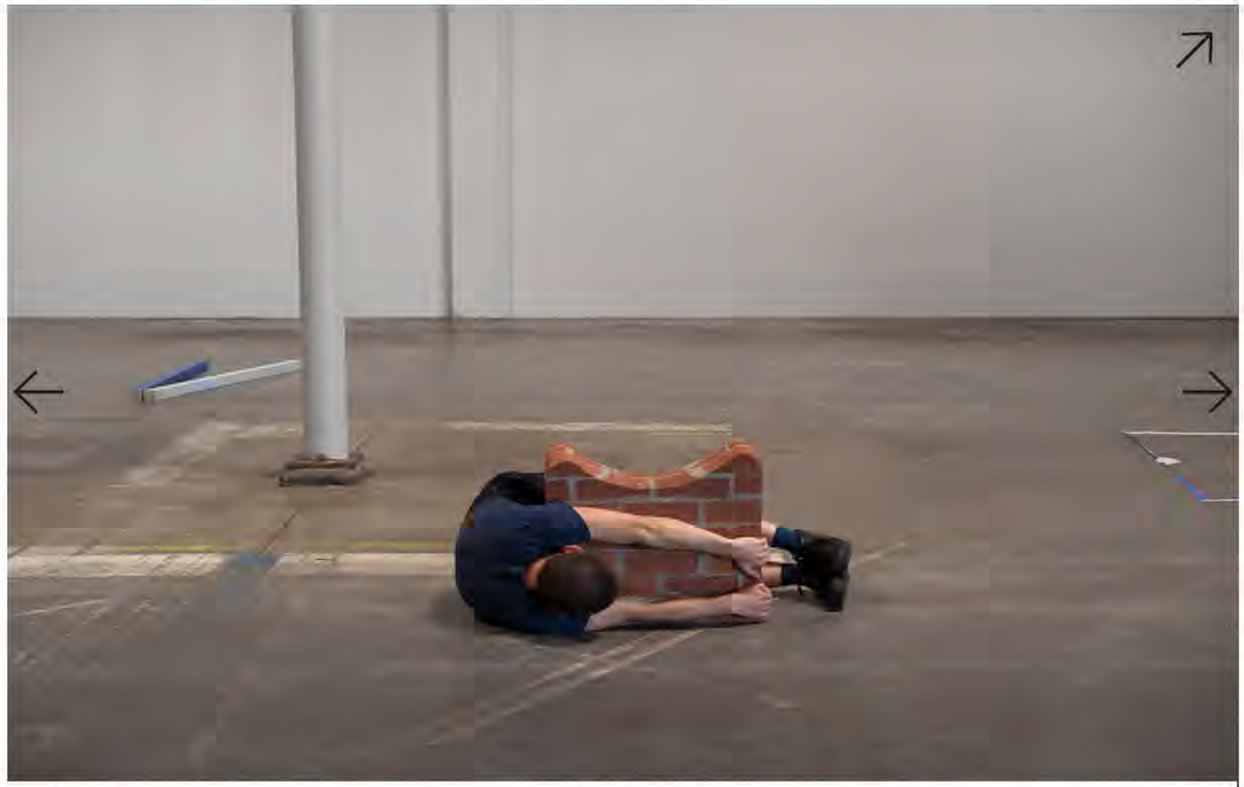
"Through and Through and Through" at Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, 2019
Courtesy: Portland Institute for Contemporary Art and Evan La Londe

Hall's sculptures act like a successive iteration that unexpectedly summons the floor of the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, calling to life the traces marking the building's former uses as a site of industrial fabrication, skateboarding, and art making alike. This all-encompassing drawing in space invites viewers' encircling bodies into a collaborative dance, echoing the way that each sculpture has been developed from the exploration of a body with a found object. In fact, Hall first trained in ballet, moving into gestural abstractions accompanied by increasingly precise and ambiguous costumes and props until there were no bodies left in the dance. In their writings, published as a collection for the first time on the occasion of this exhibition, Hall recalls that this transition took place in parallel with a more personal and political transition into ambiguity.

While all of Hall's "extremely precise objects of ambiguous use" imply movement and demand a response by bodies, the exhibition opening is interspersed by moments in which the crowd grows silent to watch solo performers engage in physical exercises; small corporeal vignettes that act in parallel to, or directly engage with, sculptures in the dancers' environs. In one such performance, local dance-trained artist Takahiro Yamamoto balances his body on the triangular edge of a sculpture base resembling a low lectern. In another, Payton Barronian gently holds two feet in midair so that the body becomes a triangular form that meets the

engage with, sculptures in the dancers' environs. In one such performance, local dance-trained artist Takahiro Yamamoto balances his body on the triangular edge of a sculpture base resembling a low lectern. In another, Payton Barronian gently holds two feet in midair so that the body becomes a triangular form that meets the floor on its axis, echoing a nearby graphite-covered wedge. These performances will continue at intervals throughout the exhibition, following the tradition of Hall's recent shows at the MIT List Visual Arts Center and the Renaissance Society.

Echoing the subtle material sensibilities of Richard Tuttle's assemblages, the works gather a range of tactilities that have a poetic persuasion. Their titles—*Stoop Ornament*, *Kneeling Object*—mingle utilitarian objecthood and human interactions, which resonates in turn with their making process: cast concrete, carved brick, waxed poplar. And yet, even in their titles, the memory of touch and the fact of human presence are near. *Floor Door* is *for Fred*; *Parallelogram Bench* is *for Dennis*. One of Hall's earlier works involved them seeing the photo of a handmade bench in a friend's grandmother's home and traveling there to replicate it. Months of research confirmed that the bench was the work of artist Dennis Croteau, whose AIDS-related death in the 1980s lends Hall's work a melancholic layer. In their book, Hall writes about their grief at the unbearable vulnerability of the nontraditionally gendered body and suggests that the pushback against misrecognition, objectification, and aggression lies in care. *THROUGH AND THROUGH AND THROUGH* cares for objects in ways that offer us a renewed experience of the (gendered) body, "so that in the moments we encounter one another, we are actually able to see differently than the way we have been taught."1 The exhibition, too, is the result of care, following the artist's three-year conversation with its curators and the collaboration of many. The radiant result makes this labor of love worth every ounce of effort.



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Gordon Hall performing for *Sitting (Brick Object) (III)*, 2019, "Through and Through and Through" at Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, 2019
Courtesy: Portland Institute for Contemporary Art and Evan La Londe

[1] Gordon Hall, "Reading Things: On Sculpture, Gender and Relearning How to See," in *OVER-BELIEFS: Gordon Hall Collected Writing*, 2011–2018, ed. Spencer Byrne-Seres (Portland, OR: Portland Institute for Contemporary Art with Container Corps, 2019), 9–13.

Gordon Hall: THROUGH AND THROUGH AND THROUGH, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA), Portland, Oregon, June 8–August 10, 2019, commissioned and curated by Roya Amirsoleymani and Kristan Kennedy, artistic directors (with Erin Boberg Doughton), PICA.

Art in America

$12 DECEMBER 2018 COVER GORDON HALL

AMONG THINGS

Bruce Nauman's sculptures and performances allow room for the complexities of an embodied intelligence.

by Gordon Hall

EVERY ONCE IN a while I get an artwork stuck in my head. Bruce Nauman's *A Cast of the Space Under My Chair* (1965–68) was one such work. For years, while sketching new sculptures or gabbing in a studio visit, I would remember it, though I'll admit that for the first few years this happened, I didn't consistently remember who made it. I didn't pause to figure it out. The sculpture just made intuitive sense to me and bubbled up every once in a while.

A couple of years ago, I did some research about a legendary piece of found furniture called the "slant step" while looking for an example of an object that was beloved because of, rather than in spite of, its ambiguous functionality. I was surprised to learn that the slant step had been purchased for Bruce Nauman in 1965 at a thrift store north of San Francisco by his graduate school mentor, William Wiley. Nauman, Wiley, and others in their Bay Area artistic circle latched onto the slant step as a sort of icon—a model for art-making or even a way of living. They organized an exhibition called "The Slant Step Show," published a book, and created a wide variety of artworks dedicated to it, including Nauman's *Mold for a Modernized Slant Step* (1966), a rough copy of the object in plaster with a groove down the middle. After that I stopped forgetting who made *A Cast of the Space Under My Chair*. It was logical to me that the artistic sensibility drawn to the slant step would also have produced this sculpture.

My excitement about the slant step originated in my pursuit of furniture and furniture-like objects that appear both functional and ambiguous, objects that refuse my efforts to easily identify them while also asking me to speculate about their possible uses. This way of thinking about objects leads to particular questions: "What is this object trying to teach me?" Or the more specific but weirder-sounding: "What does this object-body want my flesh-body to understand as a result of our encounter?"[1] I am drawn to sculpture because it speaks the same language my body does, in three dimensions, in size, weight, and movement. When I stand with it or move around it, it offers its guidance to me directly. What does *A Cast of the Space Under My Chair* have to teach me? And why couldn't I forget this modest block of concrete?

Most obviously, *A Cast of the Space Under My Chair* embodies a space I seldom, if ever, think about. By making a positive from the negative space that our bodies hover over while seated, the sculpture pushes us to remember that the spaces we inhabit are far richer, more complex, and more nuanced than we usually experience them to be. I am reminded that my typical way of perceiving the world is exceedingly narrow. I only think I know what is going on around me, or even beneath me.

This kind of phenomenological prodding out of our habituated spatial schemas can be a pleasant but unimpactful perceptual exercise. But it can also have crucial implications when taken seriously: just because we don't notice something, or can't see it, doesn't mean it isn't there. The world is full of overlooked areas of possibility that we can learn about by attuning ourselves to how our bodies share those spaces with other bodies—both the bodies of sculptures and the bodies of other human and nonhuman beings. We always have the capacity to learn to perceive what we previously overlooked.

I am reminded of a related Nauman work from the same period, *John Coltrane Piece* (1968), a three-foot-square and three-inch-thick aluminum slab with a mirrored face. Nauman put the piece on the floor with the polished mirrored surface facing down, obscuring it completely. Made shortly after the death of John Coltrane, who was known for his reticence to speak publicly about his music, Nauman's sculpture asks us to think about the nonvisible places where objects touch the floor.[2] It relies on our belief in the existence of the mirrored surface. While some viewers and critics found this obfuscation irritating, even antisocial, Nauman has said that he did not intend it that way: "To me it seemed that hiding the mirror was a positive thing, because it made for an entirely different kind of experience—the mirror reflecting and yet not being able to reflect the floor."[3] This

Bruce Nauman: *Untitled (Wall-Floor Positions)*, ca. 1965, re-created during the exhibition "Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts," 2018–19, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo Martin Seck.

All Nauman artwork this article © Bruce Nauman/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

CURRENTLY ON VIEW
"Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts," at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, through Feb. 18, 2019, and MoMA PS1, through Feb. 25, 2019.

GORDON HALL is an artist who lives in New York. See Contributors Page.

Nauman: *A Cast of the Space Under My Chair*, 1965–68, concrete, 17½ by 15⅜ by 14⅝ inches. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo. Courtesy Sperone Weswater, New York

Nauman: *Mold for a Modernized Slant Step*, 1966, plaster, 18¼ by 14½ by 13⅜ inches. Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.

makes sense to me, and I appreciate being asked to do this kind of perceptual act of faith on behalf of an object. I value the viewing of art as a means of retraining our perceptual faculties to work in less normative ways.

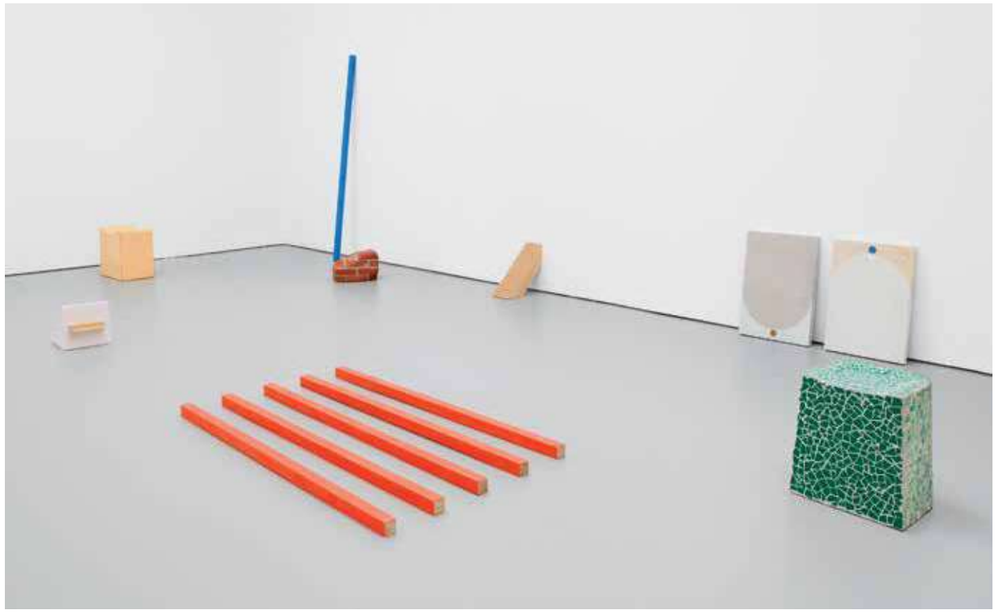
When I read each word of the title *A Cast of the Space Under My Chair*, the one that sticks out is "my"—as in "my, Bruce Nauman's, chair." Nauman, a cute white guy in his mid-twenties who had recently completed a free MFA at University of California Davis and was teaching one day a week, who had a studio near San Francisco and a lot of free time on his hands. This description of young Nauman isn't meant to be accusatory; rather, I offer it as a fulfillment of what I understand this sculpture to be asking of me. It wants me to consider the numerous events, decisions, and allowances that enabled him to be sitting in the chair that the cast space was under. Wherever there is someone sitting in a chair, there are the conditions of that person's arrival in that chair—the web of social, financial, institutional, and interpersonal events that led to a chair holding the person's body up in a specific space.

Throughout Nauman's career he was given the benefit of the doubt. It's as if the people in power around him said, "Let's get this guy a seat at the table. We may not understand what he is doing but it seems like it's probably important." Nauman was taken seriously, even while making work that was confusing, or difficult, or self-contradictory, or non-archival. He is someone who tends to have a chair pulled out for him to sit in. Now, after five decades of Nauman's charmed career, I can experience the sculpture as urging us to think through the conditions of being welcome in institutional and cultural settings, not just for Nauman, but for any of us. How did this chair end up under me, supporting my body in this place? Or, why do some kinds of artists find themselves offered a seat right away, while others have to wait, or are refused a seat altogether? *A Cast of the Space Under My Chair* is a material provocation to consider the infrastructure that holds each of us up, and to feel how this system holds some of us up better than others.

DURING THE PERIOD of free time and experimentation in his studio in the mid- to late '60s, Nauman also produced one of his best-known works, the performance video *Wall-Floor Positions* (1968), which is being re-performed by a rotating cast of dancers at the artist's retrospective, "Disappearing Acts," currently on view at the Museum of Modern Art and MoMA PS1 in New York. In the original video, Nauman earnestly plods through a long series of body positions that span his studio's wall and floor, pausing for a few seconds between each pose. The matter-of-fact quality of his untrained movement and the decisive smack of his hands and feet on the wall or floor as he arrives at each new position contribute to the sense that I am watching someone attempt to be a sculptural object.

Indeed, Nauman framed *Wall-Floor Positions* and other performance works of this period as "using my body as a piece of material and manipulating it."[4] This is not to say that the result is devoid of feeling. For me at least, it is the opposite: the becoming-object of Nauman's body produces a feeling of tenderness for him and for the vulnerability displayed in his effort to hold the more gymnastic positions, which are interspersed among moments of rest in the less taxing ones. My voyeuristic gaze at his exertion and introverted stillness, combined with the perhaps inadvertent sexuality of many of the poses, adds a quietly erotic undertone to this seemingly straightforward set of movements within the most basic of architectures.

I am reminded of a line from a review of Nauman's 1966 exhibition of sculpture at the San Francisco Art Institute: "As one looks at these things one feels that they were not designed to be looked at."[5] Though written about sculptures, this could also describe the effect of watching *Wall-Floor Positions*.



View of Gordon Hall's exhibition/performance *Brothers and Sisters*, 2018, at the Renaissance Society, Chicago. Photo Meg Noe.

I feel that I am witnessing Nauman attempt to keep himself company with a private challenge to feel the vulnerability and pleasure of becoming an object for the gaze of an unknown number of others. Judging by the crooked angle, the gap between the poorly constructed wall and floor of the studio, and the presence in the frame of the edge of some fabric-covered object he didn't bother to move out of the way before filming, I would wager that one aspect of this video's ongoing appeal is its casualness, and the feeling of intimacy that arises from watching someone do something while not really thinking that so many people would end up watching it.

I admire Nauman's effort to produce confusion around the distinctions between objects and bodies in *Wall-Floor Positions*. This mixing of categories animates many of his other early sculptures, including lesser-known works such as *Device to Stand In* (1966), a steel triangular ramp with a slot in the back where feet can be inserted. Nauman described this work as "choreography for a dance in which the viewer is invited to participate within very narrow boundaries."[6] Nauman continued this line of thinking by describing his interactive works such as *Performance Corridor* (1969) as props for videos and performances that also exist as sculptures. *Performance Corridor*, two freestanding walls facing each other to create a narrow hallway just wide enough to walk down, originated as the set for the video *Walk with Contrapposto* (1968). If I think about these works as teachers, letting my body follow their lead, I feel myself learning from them how to take up Nauman's casual confusion of boundaries and fully inhabit my objecthood. These sculptures invite me to understand myself as both a person and a thing.

Many of us have lived through numerous experiences of being nonconsensually objectified by others, and recent political events have stirred up the visceral sense of harm that objectification of this kind can produce. For me, working through these experiences has involved a dedication to taking objects seriously on their own terms, and on taking my own bodily materiality seriously as a source of healing and power. Rather than devoting my energy to being seen as a convincing subject, I have sought to make work and build a life that closes the gap between my

Nauman: *Body Pressure*, 1974, performed by visitors to "Disappearing Acts," 2018–19, at MoMA PS1, New York. Photo Walter Wlodarczyk.

Nauman: *Wall-Floor Positions*, 1968, video, 60-minute loop. Courtesy Sperone Westwater.

body and the lives of objects. I have desired to become ever more objectlike, working within my communities to develop ways to objectify one another with respect and dignity. These practices of reparative objectification are multiple and shifting, from making and caring for sculptural objects to pursuing sexual practices that find pleasure in consensual objectification to developing relations with the material world that might include things like investing in the joys of fashion and night life, or watering one's houseplants, or caring for one's possessions, or pursuing a smaller ecological footprint. I feel kinship with others who have been damagingly objectified within a culture whose underlying logic remains largely Cartesian—dividing the mind from the body and valuing the former over the latter.

There is something reparative for me about finding a resource for this project in the work of Bruce Nauman, the straight art-dad par excellence. We must hold onto our ability to find nourishment wherever we can, even when it comes from people who do not represent us, and who may not have been thinking of us as a potential audience. Finding a way into work that one might initially write off as irrelevant to one's experience is one way of exercising this capacity. The artist and choreographer Ralph Lemon elaborated on this possibility in his 2003 work *After Bruce Nauman's Wall–Floor Positions (1965)*, in which he restaged *Wall–Floor Positions* with another black performer at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. What are the stakes for different kinds of bodies experimenting with "becoming-object," especially when those bodies look like ones whose historical equation with objects has been genocidal? Lemon inserted himself into the body-object relation that was so casually taken up by Nauman, claiming it as his own in spite—or because—of the precariousness of this identification.

When I first saw that MoMA would be presenting a Nauman retrospective both at its Manhattan location and at PS1 in Queens, I thought: "Really? This year, with the fog of toxic white masculinity we have been slogging through?" I want a New York art world that is as diverse as the city itself, and a Bruce Nauman retrospective is not contributing to this effort. I wish for shows that *correct* the historical record, not reify it. I wish that museums would invest in all different kinds of people making a wider array of artworks, and not in a tokenizing, checking-off-the-box way that does little to sustainably support artists as they develop.

However, I cannot overlook Nauman's work. I want art that is difficult, hard to place, or even hard to see. I want art that frustrates our attempts to say what it is "about," that makes us feel ridiculous for trying to translate it into any easy explication or summary. I seek experiences with art that are destabilizing and strange. And I need artworks that give us space to notice and feel and grieve without telling us what to think.

All of these desires draw me to Nauman's work. And so I feel some trepidation as I am moved by these sculptures and performances, knowing that I am out of step with our moment's enthusiasm for identitarian allegiances based primarily on artists' biographies. I will not use an artist's identity as a prerequisite for caring about their work, or finding something of myself within it. Just as I do not need to identify with all work made by people who are like me, I also do not think that any artists or artworks are beyond my ability to find something of personal and political use in them. I find that Nauman's early works still have something to teach me. My body is ready to learn. ○

1. I have addressed these issues in two previous essays on sculpture: "Reading Things: Gordon Hall on Gender, Sculpture, and Relearning How to See," *Walker Reader*, Aug. 8, 2016, walkerart.org; and "Object Lessons—Thinking Gender Variance Through Minimalist Sculpture," *Art Journal* 72, no. 4, Winter 2013.
2. The contextualizing information for *John Coltrane Piece* comes from the pamphlet for "Bruce Nauman: Inside Out," a traveling exhibition that was on view at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, from March 1 to May 23, 1995 ("Bruce Nauman," exhibition pamphlet, *Star Ledger*, Newark, N.J., 1995, p. 7). There seems to be some confusion about Coltrane's biography in relation to the work's title. In a 1994 catalogue raisonné, the notes for this work say that Coltrane "sometimes played with his back to the audience." But as Ralph Lemon pointed out to me in an email on Oct. 15, 2018, Coltrane was not known for doing this; it was Miles Davis who is famous for facing away from the audience while performing. It is unclear whether it was Nauman or the author of the notes to the work in the catalogue raisonné who was mistaken.
3. Bruce Nauman quoted in Willoughby Sharp, "Nauman Interview, 1970," *Please Pay Attention Please: Bruce Nauman's Words*, ed. Janet Kraynak, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2003, p. 129.
4. Ibid., p. 122.
5. Knute Stiles, "William Geis and Bruce Nauman," *Artforum*, December 1966, p. 65.
6. "Device to Stand In (1966)," in *Bruce Nauman: Exhibition Catalogue and Catalogue Raisonné,* ed. Joan Simon, Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, 1994, p. 200.

View of Hall's exhibition/performance *The Number of Inches Between Them*, 2017–18, at the MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Mass. Photo Cassandra J. Rodriguez/Stealth Visuals.

FLASH ART

Luchita Hurtado, *Untitled*, 1970. Oil on canvas. 30×50 in.

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herself with some spectral timekeeper. She punctuated the performance with spoken-word descriptions of people ingesting chemicals, wondering aloud what effects such absorptions might produce. At some point I realized that the materials Nkanga was sifting through must be filling the gallery, even though I couldn't see any particulate matter with my naked eyes. I was struck by the fact that I didn't know what I was breathing.

4 GORDON HALL

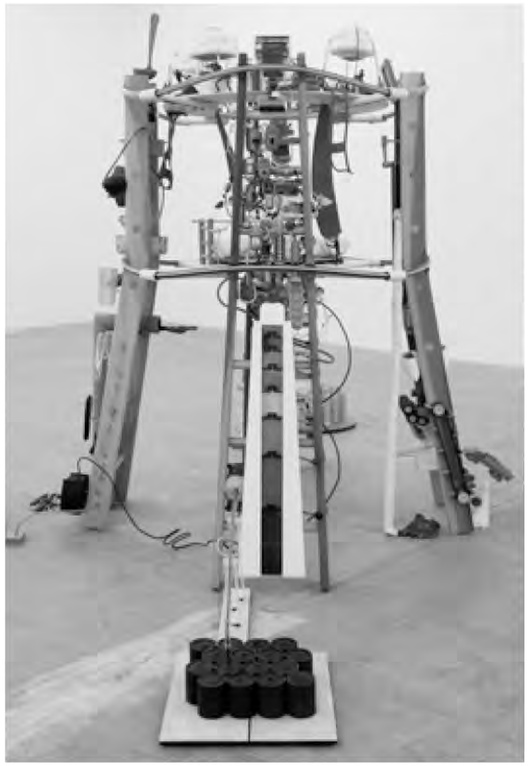
MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge
By Dana Kopel

Two groups of off-white concrete panels of varying geometric shapes are the sole occupants of the small gallery in Gordon Hall's exhibition at the MIT List Visual Arts Center. Some lean against the wall while others are assembled into a structure resembling a fort or bench. These two sculptures are each other's double: one an unconstructed version of the other, a replica of a bench-*cum*-artwork by the late, little-known artist Dennis Croteau, which Hall first encountered in a friend's yard in New Jersey.

The spare exhibition also includes a poster that visitors are invited to take (it features a photograph of Croteau's original bench and, on the reverse side, an undeliverable letter Hall wrote to him) and an afternoon performance presented in the space. Hall often interweaves sculpture and performance, making minimalist objects specifically to explore how bodies respond to them. The performance at the List Center, a version of which was presented at a barn in Maine last year, began with one performer – an older person in black trousers and a spring jacket, carrying a practical handbag – standing up from the front row of the audience to sit, facing us, on the sculpture. Then Hall, the youngest of the performers by several decades, moved around, atop, and through the structure, sitting upon and gripping parts of it or else lying face down, head resting on a board as if it were a pillow. Each of the five performers took turns enacting series of repeated movements in response to the sculpture, with Hall later announcing hour marks – from one to twelve o'clock – while shifting positions, creating a sort of abstract sundial. The room was otherwise quiet, the tone slow and deliberate; the performers' audible breathing shifted focus onto my own breathing, my own body.

Together, the sculptures and the performance are titled *The Number of Inches Between Them* (2017-18), after an interview with artist Scott Burton, a major reference in Hall's practice who, like Croteau, passed away from AIDS-related complications in 1989. Burton frequently worked with furniture forms (he made the benches in the List Center's atrium), as does Hall, as a means of thinking about the body relationally: how bodies move through space and become legible (or not) through interaction. In a conversation after the performance with art historian David Getsy, Hall reflected that "every piece of furniture conjures a ghost – a body that uses it." That ghost or absence feels especially palpable in this exhibition, as it traces not only the physical space between people and things, but also the temporal gap that separates those of us present from Croteau, Burton, and countless others lost to AIDS – and the grief and longing that rest there.

3 Otobong Nkanga, *Social Consequences II–Constructivism*, 2009. Acrylic and stickers on paper. 16½×17⁷⁄₁₆ in. Courtesy of Paul van Esch & Partners Collection, Amsterdam.
4 Gordon Hall, *The Number of Inches Between Them*, 2017. Pigment cast concrete, color poster multiple; performance, 39 min. Performers: Mary Bok, Gordon Hall, Mike Peterson, Lou Desautels, Danny Harris. Photography by Cassandra Rodriguez. Courtesy of the artist.



5 Benjamin Reiss, *Package Factory (Natural Marriage of Natural Resources)*, 2016-18. Wood, MDF, epoxy, acrylic, PVC, ABS, styrene, urethane, latex, vinyl, Papier-mâché, concrete, plaster, copper, steel, sculpey, wires, graph paper, hula hoops, party toothpicks, plastic cups, funnels. 58×95×93 in. approximately. Courtesy of the artist.

5 BENJAMIN REISS
Package Factory (Natural Marriage of Natural Resources)

Bel Ami, Los Angeles
By Keith J. Varadi

Benjamin Reiss's exhibition "Package Factory (Natural Marriage of Natural Resources)" is simultaneously one of excess and refinement, genuine in its ingenuity and sardonic with its sincerity. What you see is what you get, but in order to get it all, you must seek it all.

The show centers around an eponymous sculpture (2016-18), a multitiered wooden structure housing an epic game of chutes and ladders. On the upper circuit, playfully primary-colored epoxy clay miniatures work together in the first scene of a staged simulation of a total industrial complex – agriculture, health care, infrastructure, technology, and transportation are all illustrated along the infernal descent. The figures lift, carry, and unload various widgets and wares; we see where the items are going, but to what end and why? Equal parts plastic army toys and corporate pharma logos, they conceivably embody the coalescence of military and commercial interests in twenty-first-century globalization. On the next tier down, more doodled dudes engage in futile exercises, lowering cottony cloudlike "dream products" with cables, setting them on a circular railroad track to nowhere, reminiscent of the holiday season at an outdoor mall. On the ground level, carrots are plucked and planted, and even turned into baby carrots.

There is an impressive DIY sensibility to this three-dimensional world the artist has created, with everything seemingly made by hand, aside from the two slightly warped hula hoops that function like planetary rings around a cartoonishly chaotic ecosphere. Reiss mocks the brand of Marxism taught in art schools, while concurrently critiquing the capitalism that controls so many of the creative decisions of these programs' graduates.

There is no waste – that is the thesis, evidenced by the copious sheets of "research" hanging on the walls, which serve as blueprints for what's on display. They contain messages like "I don't care who you are or what size you are im gonna magnetize you." To whom is Reiss speaking, and what does this mean? Here, it appears he is simply dictating to himself, his own personal secretary. But who is dictating to the doodled dudes? The meta-metaphors climb and shoot ad infinitum in the package factory.

6 WOLFGANG STOERCHLE
"before you can pry any secrets from me"

Overduin & Co., Los Angeles
By Thomas Duncan

In 1962, Wolfgang Stoerchle (1944-1976) filmed and photographed his horseback journey from Toronto to Los Angeles. Though documented for personal record, Stoerchle later dubbed the expedition a monumental performance. Such self-mythologizing is peppered throughout the artist's compelling if uneven output, which includes painting, sculpture, performance, fictional news, and video. Tragically, a car accident cut his life short at the age of thirty-two. In lieu of a warranted museum survey, Overduin & Co.'s recent exhibition, astutely curated by Paris-based editor and publisher Alice Dusapin, makes up for institutional lag.

After middling forays into painting and sculpture, Stoerchle began leaning toward performance and was soon drawn to video. It was through this medium that the artist hit his stride, exploring its potential as both an archive of performance and a conduit for technological experimentation. Happily, the Overduin show was largely dedicated to this facet of Stoerchle's output. Particularly noteworthy was *Crawling out of clothes* (1970-72), in which the artist set up an interconnected series of cameras and monitors, creating a mise-en-abyme of registration, display, and re-registration through which the

Left: Zoe Leonard, *How to Make Good Pictures*. Top left: Gordon Hall, *The Number of Inches Between Them*. Above and detail: Dineo Seshee Bopape, *mabu / mubu / mmu*.

the construction of fantasies and competing truths, teasing out distortions caused by (mis)translation and willful misinterpretation. "Shouting is Under Calling" features a wide range of recent projects exploring everything from contraband to bloodlines to the staged signings of peace treaties, from an ornithological study of the birds in Bond films to an homage to the New York Public Library's picture archive (whose classification system also gave the exhibition its title). Inspired and governed by order, Simon's works deliberately embody the same control and authority they seek to expose, with the key difference that everything is open to scrutiny. Their technical, physical, and aesthetic transparency reveals the agenda and behind-the-scenes machinations, giving the lie to assumed neutrality and calling attention to the invisible hands pulling the strings of even the most seemingly benign system.

Web site
<www.kunstmuseumluzern.ch>

MIT List Visual Arts Center

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Gordon Hall

Through May 20, 2018

A sculptor, performer, and writer, Hall examines the personal and political effects of how we relate to objects and to each other. Investigating how we might use and physically interact with handmade abstract forms and creatively reconstructed copies of found objects, he reveals the social and political dynamics of engagement. Intentional, yet enigmatic, these objects function as both provocative instigators of performance and allegories for an ethics of relationality. His new project, *The Number of Inches Between Them*, continues a series of works replicating found, one-of-a-kind pieces of furniture. A twice duplicated, geometric stone bench discovered in a friend's backyard appears first as eight interlocking cast concrete panels assembled into seating and then as the same components disassembled and leaning against the walls. All aspects of the object—its design, tactile quality, material, history, and the narrative of its maker (the largely unknown Dennis Croteau, who died in 1989)—become implicated in its reanimation, raising questions of functionality, attraction, intimacy, and accessibility.

Web site
<https://listart.mit.edu>

Pinchuk Art Centre

Kyiv, Ukraine

Dineo Seshee Bopape

Through May 13, 2018

Bopape, winner of the 2017 Future Generation Art Prize, has stated that she hopes to "tickle" something in the viewer, planting seeds of memory that might sprout into future visions through verbally inexpressible metaphysical encounters. Sown with feathers, gold leaf, healing herbs, and sculpted objects (including clay pieces formed by a clenched fist), her molded and compressed soil structures explore a liminal terrain located somewhere in the borderlands between myth, history, ritual, and present-day reality. Despite the evocative associations, these raw landscapes record a politics of locus, scarred from battles for sovereignty over land and bodies. Wealth and impoverishment, exploitation of natural and human resources, colonizer and colonized rise to the surface in installations that undermine the machismo and domination of land art. In *mabu / mubu / mmu*, a new iteration of a project first presented in Venice last year, formed Ukrainian soil breaks up encrusted nationalistic associations to host synergies of signs, beliefs, and energies, expanding from politicized propaganda to embrace more deeply rooted systems of belief. Like all of Bopape's recent works, this is an evolving environment, matter to be reformed in the face of different geographies and contexts.

Web site
<www.pinchukartcentre.org>

Whitney Museum of American Art

New York

Zoe Leonard

Through June 10, 2018

Leonard's photographs, sculptures, and installations combine lyrical, psychologically astute observations of daily life with a rigorous questioning of the politics and conditions that

ODYSSEY:
noun
[od·ys·sey]
1. a long wandering or voyage usualy marked by many changes of fortune.
2. an intellectual or spiritual wandering or quest.

OUT OF ORDER

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ODYSSEY

GORDON HALL

Interview **Andrew Kachel**

I met Gordon Hall in 2014, while working as a freelance curator. We were serendipitously paired up by a nonprofit organization to organize a series of "experimental" artist-on-artist conversations, which sought to materialize different ways in which artists could engage in dialogues with, upon, alongside, and through their work—consciously rebuffing discursive formats of talking about their work. Shortly thereafter I was invited to perform in Hall's piece in the exhibition *FLEX* at Kent Fine Art (curated by Orlando Tirado). The performance, *STAND AND* (2014), took place at the handball courts in Chelsea Park, off West 28th Street, where on a warm fall Saturday seven performers worked together to continuously move the seven components of a modular sculpture into new configurations, bodies pressed against the wood and fabric panels and the surface of the court itself, responding to sculptural curves, cues from other performers, and the environment—typically reserved for athletic activity, but on that afternoon accommodating a different kind of physical play. The performers in that piece, composed of artists, writers, curators, and other makers, went on to form the initial constituency of a critique group that continues to meet monthly with the express purpose of maintaining a platform for discussing each other's work in a constructive and challenging environment.

I came to know Hall's work through the expansive approach to art discourse that marked our very first collaboration, and a shared commitment to exploring thought materially, collectively, and over long durations. On the eve of Hall's solo exhibition at the Portland Institute of Contemporary Art and a related publication of collected writings from 2011 to 2018, I spoke with Hall about the process of making paired performances and sculptures, tensions between horizons of possibility and artistic intention, and the vulnerability inherent in purposeful action.

Andrew Kachel We are in your studio in Crown Heights, looking west out the window, at a very beautiful pink sunset and pink clouds reflecting in the water on the rooftop, which you pointed out earlier. It made me think about some of the first encounters I had with your work, because some of the things I recall include painted surfaces that are positioned against the wall in some way, presenting almost a shine of color or a reflection on the wall, more a cloudy ethereal presence of color. I'm also thinking about those particular works in dialogue with the works you've made for your show at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, in Portland, Oregon (*THROUGH AND THROUGH AND THROUGH: GORDON HALL*, June 8 to August 10, 2019). Some of which have a much more definite material presence, I would say, if not immediately intelligible forms. There is a certain kind of ambiguity, I think, a certain game in trying to arrive at some possible understanding of them. I don't think of these new works as having such an obvious component of ephemerality in comparison to those earlier works. Do you think about there being a relation between these works? How has your work changed over the years, and what do you think it carries with it from those earlier works?

Gordon Hall Thank you for those up—it feels good to remember them in the midst of finishing all these new pieces. I made them to be objects where the brightest colors are not visible except as a shadow or a reflection on the wall behind the piece. To me, they always felt like they were facing away from you, backing into the wall and showing you their brightest side only as a trace. I continue to be interested in that feeling, of being drawn to something you can't directly see, that sense of withholding. I haven't made any of these reflection works in a couple of years, but I could always return to it. In the case of the show at PICA, the eighteen sculptures are in the center of a 10,000-square-foot space, so the walls really aren't part of the equation, and those works rely on white walls in order to function. There is, I think, a continuation of this feeling of hiding or facing away in many of the individual works and in the PICA exhibition as a whole. Objects with sides you can't see—stacked objects, or objects where you can see the trace of a bright color on the bottom, pressed against the floor. And more broadly I'm still pursuing this feeling of both familiarity and strangeness, like encountering an object that has architectural aspects and abstract aspects, or that reminds you of something but isn't quite that thing. To me it feels very much along the same lines as the shadow works, it's just a different route to the get there.

AK I'm also interested in how your works come to involve

This page
and previous spread
THROUGH AND THROUGH AND THROUGH
installation view, all works 2019 (performance still)

performance in a direct way. Whether you have a clear idea of a performance that will happen with them, or on them, or in conjunction with them, and for some works maybe not. And although it may not be a clear distinction—some works have performative elements and some works do not—it seems like there are indeed works that don't have performative elements that you made?

GH I always make the objects first and then figure out both if there's a performance that happens in conjunction with them and if so what it is, what the "in conjunction" is—is a body on it? touching it? with it? or is it around it, in proximity to it, sort of coming from something about it? There are always sculptures that don't generate performance, which is very important to me. Or, in some instances, there is something that happens with them but it's very small and easily missed. A small movement, or a sound. For the show at PICA, I am approaching performance in a way I haven't before. Instead of having a 30-minute or hour-long performance that has an audience that sits down and watches it, the 18 sculptures each generate a very short performance that happens, unannounced, intermittently throughout the day, no more than every 20 minutes, and sometimes less than that. These performances are mostly solos, with a couple of duets and trios as well, and because there are 18 of them, no audience member will see them all. And I've been trying some new things. For example, there's a piece in the show that's a cast-concrete shim, with ridges on the top and bottom and a cylindrical hole in the middle that goes all the way through, down to the floor. I asked it over and over again what it wanted from me. In the end, it produced a performance in which an ice cube in the shape of a soda can melts on the sidewalk outside the show.

AK The ice cube is the shape of a soda can.

GH Yes, it's exactly a soda can.

AK You made a mold.

GH: I made a mold of a can and then I poured water in it, and then it makes a beautiful ice-cube can.

AK What is its relationship to that piece?

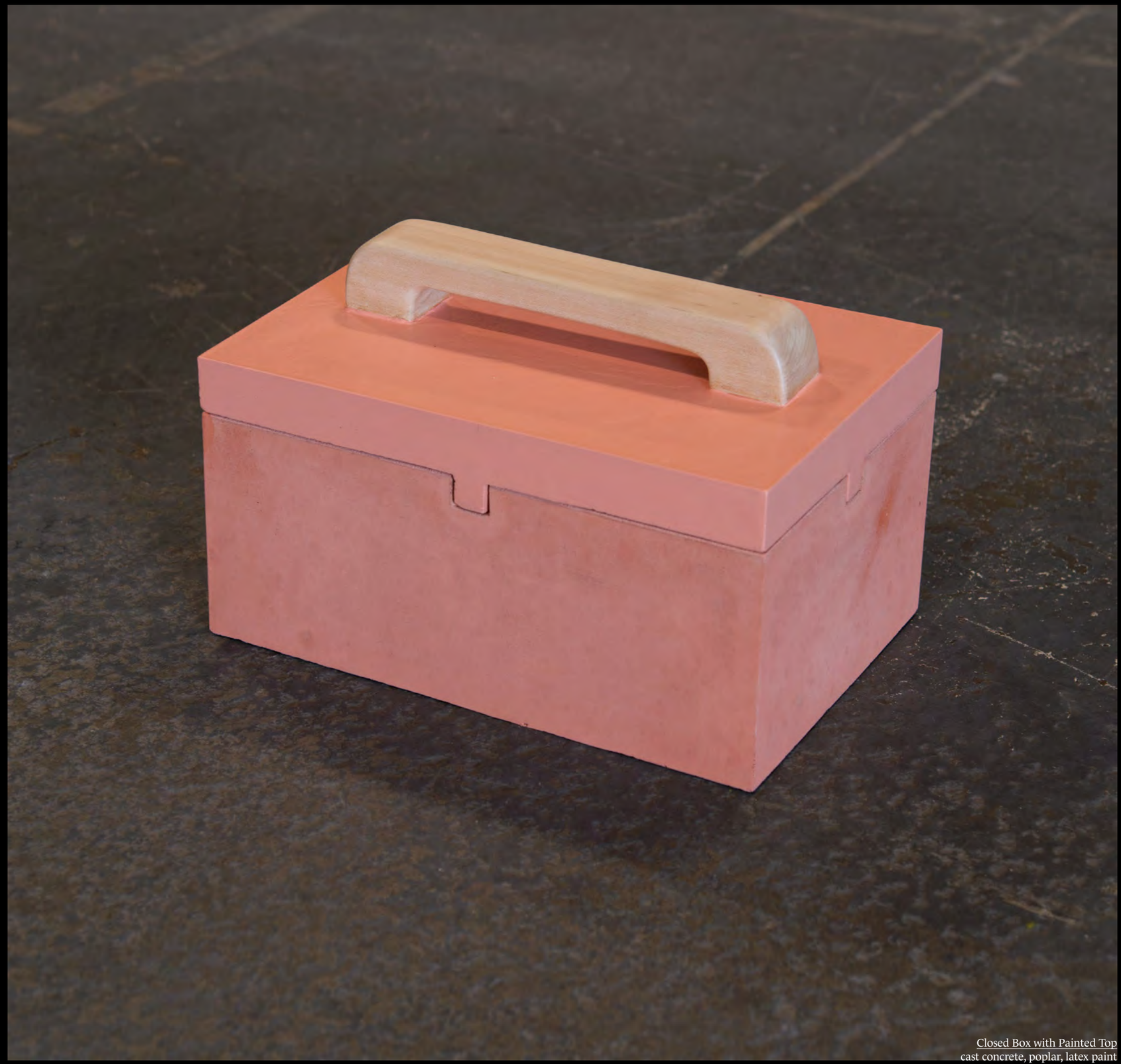
GH It's an echo of the cylindrical hole in the sculpture, but as it melts it registers the weather, the temperature, the sun—all of which are parts of the show, which is heavily reliant on the sunlight coming through the skylights and windows. And the slowness of this melting produces a pace which is similar to the patches of light that cross the space, and the slowness of the exhibition as a whole, the pace requested by my work.

AK What other sculptures in the exhibition generated performances that felt like new territory for you or pushed specific performative strategies forward?

GH There's a piece in the show called *"Facing L's"* (2019). It's two waist-high, smooth, L-shaped pieces of painted concrete, and there's a pencil line down the middle. Anyway, they face each other but they don't touch—they're an inch apart, facing (or perhaps back-to-back). The performance that correlates with them is two people walking around the space, around the perimeter of the group of works in a big circle, and all they have to do is walk around at a good clip and keep eye contact with each other as they walk. Will the viewer necessarily know that it correlates with that particular object? Perhaps not, but they do know in a general sense that everything they see in some way has to do with one of the sculptures. In that sense it's more like the object is setting up a relationship between bodies which is then being turned into this dance. This is one of two performances in which the performers wear their street clothes, perhaps carry a bag, have their phone in their pocket—so it isn't always apparent that they aren't just regular people there seeing the show who start doing this linked circular walking. I want some of the performances to not immediately announce themselves as such.

AK We've talked about this a lot in the past, you and I and our crit group, and you just alluded to it—these objects dictating what the performances will be, or you waiting for the objects to tell you things, which I think is a really compelling aspect of your work. But I also wonder, after working on these objects and these performances, whether it ends up creating a cyclical dynamic. Whether you've ever made an object either in whole or in part as a response to an aspect of performance in your work?

GH I really try to make objects without knowing what, if anything, will be done with them, around them, in relation to them. I've disciplined myself not to imagine the performances while I'm making objects. I have to finish them first, then I set them up in a space and try to figure out what they want to happen. Some of them speak more clearly than others, so when it's finally time, I know right away what it is, what to do. Which is partly based on what I learned about them while making them, the intimacy we established through that. Other sculptures are harder—it takes time, various attempts, or I get stuck. And I have to listen longer to hear from them. The reason I don't make objects for specific performance ideas is because I am not making props. In typical theatre or dance, if there is an action that needs an object, the action is already known and then



Closed Box with Painted Top
cast concrete, poplar, latex paint

OVER-BELIEFS
cast concrete

the object has to be acquired in order to make that possible. That, from what I understand, is a prop—you need to sit, so a chair has to be gotten. In that dynamic, the person's need is primary and the object is secondary, a response to that need. It could be any chair, within certain parameters. In my work, I reverse this dynamic. The objects are first and we are responding to their needs. Maybe we are the props?

AK This seems like a real generosity of spirit toward the objects, a kind of reverence for the objects in and of themselves. Allowing the objects to dictate things rather than the objects just *being* things that people use in a functional way. But the objects are also very much things that *you* make. They're not found objects, even if they have relationships to found objects—and it seems like most of the works in this show do have relationships to objects that hold specific or personal meaning for you.

GH Almost all, there actually is one found object in this show, but that's…we can talk about that later.

AK Okay [laughs], but I wonder then how you think about your role as both a selector of certain forms and as a maker. It's hard to articulate this, but in elevating the object's role to something that is equally primary as a performing body, or maybe even that makes a performing body secondary and subject to the object's demands, there's also your role as overseer.
So, I wonder if there are strategies in your practice in which you try to either account for that or…I know you have so many rules in your practice, ways in which you actively try to work against that sort of, I guess you could call it subjective influence as an artist, on the sculptures and performances you make [laughs], which maybe sounds sort of crazy—

GH This is a complicated question. People have often described my work as on the one hand very controlled, even rigid, and on the other hand as generous and open.
I would think these modes would be in contradiction with each other, but in the world of my work, perhaps they aren't. At the root of this is a lifelong effort to figure out how to relate to physical objects, the materiality of the world and our own bodies in it. You know, I come from a very intellectual family, a culture of intellectual values, of prioritizing what our minds can do, including text-based communication, reading and writing, thought. I don't reject any of these things, but I couldn't understand the implication that they are immaterial. As a kid, I gathered—and who knows, kids distort things—but I had the impression that if you cared about physical things, you were materialistic, even shallow. As I grew older, I felt like that way of thinking about the status of objects worked less and less well, because life is filled with things, and I needed a theory of objects that enables me to care about them in a way that isn't destructive of myself and others, that accounts for our materiality in a physical world. I've worked this dilemma out in the studio, cultivating a relationship of care with objects, through making them. As I get to a place in my career where I have more help in the studio, more fabrication support, I never want to be fully separated from the labor of making my own work. Not because I'm interested in work for its own sake, but because the way that I know an object through making it is a particular kind of intimacy and care that I can't produce any other way. So that's what's going on with it for me, and then my hope is that by offering these objects to others, both in the way they're made, arranged in the space, and then in the way that they're treated by these performing bodies, that this care for objects will be palpable. This is what I am offering to others, the feeling that every aspect of this universe has been considered. And there is, I hope, something reparative about that relation of care with objects, which is something I've written about over the years.
What happens when you identify with objects or confuse yourself with an object? After the trauma of all the various forms of nonconsensual objectification that we've all experienced—I especially have had a lot of experiences of that in my life—what is it to claim objecthood within a context that I created?
I'm creating a universe where objectification happens, but it's on my terms, with objects I made, with my own body, with the bodies of others who have consented to participate. And in this I find repair, agency, and often pleasure.

AK I think it certainly makes sense to think about your engagement with objects as one that is motivated not least by concerns of care. And I'm interested also in how that plays out in your performances. I think it's very clear when you perform with your sculptures how that plays out, but I wonder what kind of dialogues you have with others who perform with your works? Because I know you've made a lot of performances with friends as performers. I was a performer in your work very shortly after we met. And I think it was only after that point that you started working with other individuals who you knew but maybe weren't peers, or other performers that you cast specifically for certain pieces. Obviously in these situations there is a choreographic practice, or there are certain discussions, I would imagine, about things that the work is doing. But I also imagine that there is a certain degree of withholding in the interest of not being too dictatorial [laughs], holding open a certain amount of space for an individual's agency or for a particular kind of relation or way of being with an object to unfold.
So how do you talk about your performances with the individuals who are performing in them?

GH Well, coming from a dance and improvisation background it feels natural to me to explain and look at and think about moving with other people. But yes, it's important that performers are being themselves in the work, even if it's within my constraints, which are sometimes very narrow. So since I'm going to Portland next week to train the 14 performers who will be in this show, I've been thinking about how I'm going to approach it. And basically I'm going to show them the 18 performances and they're going to be able to choose which ones they want to learn. Then the process of them learning it — I make it really clear that they're not necessarily trying to impersonate me, they're not a stand-in for me, they're doing it the way their body does it. So if it's something really simple, like sitting down in a chair, or something chairlike, people do it incredibly differently, but the way that you do it is the way that feels natural to your body, and if you try to do it like someone else you look really silly. It's a weird thing, because in some sense I'm training them, but what I'm trying to train them to do, is —

AK To do what they would naturally do? [laughs]

GH Yeah, to do what they would naturally do and to be themselves within the constraints of the universe of the work, in which the options are quite limited. The first piece that I made that had strangers performing in it was *The Number of Inches Between Them* (2017–2018, presented at the MIT List Visual Arts Center), and that was because I wanted people who were older, like 70 or 80 years old, for a variety of reasons I can talk about, but in that case especially what I was interested in was the quality of their movement that was being affected by the limitations of a body that is aging and losing various abilities they previously had. So in that case it wasn't being like, "Okay, you watch me do it and then you do it." Sometimes it's just me saying, "Okay so walk over to the sculpture and then sit down." And saying that is actually more open than me demonstrating it, because then they're not trying to copy me, they just walk over and sit, the way they would.

AK Who are the performers for the pieces in Portland?

GH They are all people based in Portland that have some connection with PICA. PICA does a lot of performing arts programming, so a lot of them are people who have performance practices of their own, like Sidony O'neal, Linda Austin, Takahiro Yamamoto, and numerous others. And then there are other performers who have very little performance experience. It's a little bit challenging for me, because when I was working on the piece at MIT I went back and forth to have rehearsals with the people in the

Left
I/
colored pencil on poplar.

Right
Sitting (Brick Object) (III)
collaboration with Octavius Neveaux,
carved brick

Three-part Stool (Cream, Beige, and Green)
cast concrete

piece every weekend for two months. With this, I have just ten days with them. But it's also less daunting than teaching long choreographic phrases, because these performances are so short and some of them are really simple, like holding a pose and very slowly turning your head.

AK Do you know which particular performances individuals have chosen to learn?

GH They haven't chosen yet.

AK They haven't chosen yet.

GH No. But part of letting them choose is wanting it to be consensual. For example, there's one piece in the show that's this castconcrete, painted, hanging bar that's hung at a height so that you hold it over your head, sort of hang on it while kneeling on the floor. So you're kneeling there with your legs open and your arms up, hanging on this thing, and it ends up looking and feeling rather sexual, a sort of erotic objectification, and I certainly want to do that to make sure people can choose one only if they are comfortable being in that position in public.

AK I know that with certain objects, you have relationships with them that are quite complicated and nuanced. And some seem resistant to giving up certain aspects of their natures, as you mentioned. Are there performances for this upcoming show that you still haven't quite figured out? Some that might even change once you're working with performers in the space?

GH Yes, there are a couple I am still working out, and I don't think I will know until I have them arranged in the exhibition. I'll be able to see them in relation to bodies from that long distance away, which will help me understand what I have made and what to do with it. The central piece of this show is this nonfunctional cast-concrete water fountain, which is a copy of a water fountain I pass every day on my way walking to the studio. The show started with the idea to make the fountain, and it's taller than anything else in the show, and I think it's going to be positioned in the front of a group of objects. And I'm trying to understand what it *wants.* It has a little step, and it has a basin…It's the conductor. It's standing in front of the objects, conducting the other objects, so…

AK In one of our last conversations with the crit group we talked about the placement of that piece, even whether it made sense for it to be apart from the rest of the objects. I think you were always thinking about it as somehow having its own unique relation to the other objects.

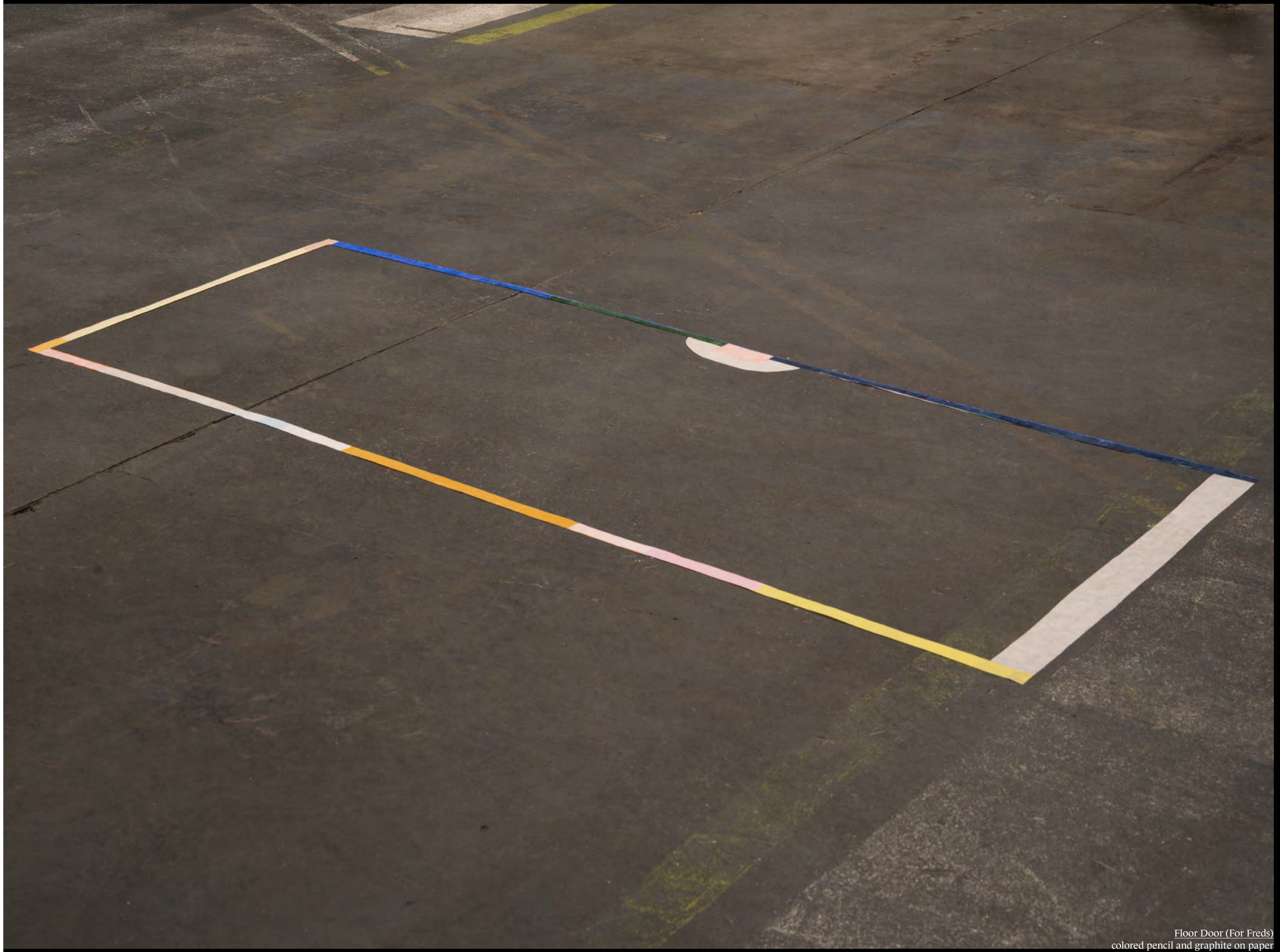
GH Yeah, I can't quite figure out how close or how far it is from the main group, but I do think I want it to be such that it's the first one you see when you come in, and it's right in the front. So these are things that are getting figured out in relation to its placement, this sense of it watching all the other things [laughs]. I keep imagining someone reading, aloud, or to themselves, next to it or in the corner of the gallery across the room…I'm not sure yet.

AK Could you describe the relationship between your practice of making sculptures and performances and your writing practice? You have a pretty prolific practice as a writer, which is related to your work as an artist. I know it's a bit of a false dichotomy because in some regards these are not separate endeavors…In fact, they're probably not distinguishable in any real sense other than—

GH I get to wear my clean clothes for one of them.

AK Yeah, exactly. So there's a sartorial difference [laughs]. But a lot of your performances involve texts that you have written or texts that you have edited from various sources. So I wonder whether that is a distinction that you think about. Like how and when to involve your writing in your performance or to put your writing in direct dialogue with objects you made. Or if it's more intuitive?

GH For me writing is like the access road that goes along the highway, which is the objects I am making. Running parallel and occasionally intersecting. Like we were talking about before, working on both in such a way as to complicate the division between intellectual and physical work. I'm thinking about the materiality of spoken and written language, about what it can be to speak from your body to other bodies, or what teaching and learning is in a material way, and my work on lecture performances—both making them and also organizing other people to do them—comes out of this interest. I love that dual meaning of the word "reading". What we do with a text or as an aspect of vision and identification. Trying to complicate the read. It's not that I don't understand writing and making to be distinct, but in the moments where I want to put a performance script with an object, for example, I'm thinking about the ways a projected voice is vibrating in a room and actually taking up the space between the mouth it comes out of and the ears that it's going into, or the body that feels these vibrations. Or thinking about the ways that when we hear people's words we are hearing their meaning, physically. We're being affected by their meaning. Like someone tells you something horrible and your heart starts beating, you're sweating—all the different ways that these distinctions between different realms are actually not



Floor Door (For Freds)
colored pencil and graphite on paper

Parallelogram Bench (for Dennis)
cast concrete

operational in our everyday lives. We just think they are.

AK Yes, and I think sometimes an encounter with objects you've made can definitely provoke a similar feeling of being startled, or being aroused, or, I don't know… hearing something and not understanding it. Similarly, seeing something and not understanding it. I think especially the works in this show function in all those registers to different degrees.

GH Well, it works the other way for me too. Like, for example, What are the similarities and differences between arranging paragraphs in an essay and arranging sculptures in an exhibition? When I arrange sculptures in an exhibition I am thinking about what path the person is taking, in a narrative sense. Like which objects do I want them to see first, second, third, and also lines of sight and which objects are held together in them. But thinking that way felt very freeing as a way of writing, too. Arranging the sentences and paragraphs in a text like the sculptures in an exhibition. Arriving at them in an order but without it necessarily being explained to a reader why it is ordered in that way, right?

AK Right.

GH Or there's the possibility that somebody could walk around the room in a different way than you, and they always will.

AK Right, certainly less possible with reading texts, but that would be interesting. Although sometimes your texts also have… I guess you could say almost a resonance with something like concrete poetry? Or at least they have specific forms that are not necessarily what one would find in narrative writing or critical writing. Words on a page that don't function in a linear way.

GH For me as a reader and a viewer, so much of my ability to keep my attention on something has to do with trusting the way the maker is putting these things in proximity to each other, even if it isn't totally clear to me what is going on. Feeling like I believe the arrangement, the decisions, the inclusions and omissions, even as the reasons for them may remain opaque. And, so, just as I wouldn't want to make a sculpture exhibition where you come to an object and you think, Where the hell did this come from?" or This has nothing to do with the universe that was being created for me by these other objects that I am already dealing with," I always try to write in such a way that I don't break the trust of my reader by suddenly giving them something that falls so outside of the logic of the piece that it feels arbitrary or aggressively impenetrable. Even when things are difficult I never want the viewer or the reader to lose the thread of trust

in me, the sense of intentionality, the feeling that every arrangement is one of the right formations of the work.

AK I'm sure that value of trust was something that guided the compilation of your writing that PICA published in conjunction with their exhibition, *OVER-BELIEFS: Gordon Hall Collected Writing, 2011–2018* (2019). What was it like looking back on nearly a decade of writing, especially alongside the process of putting together the exhibition?

GH This is my first experience of seeing all my writing in one volume, which has felt really big in a bunch of different ways. I arranged the book nonchronologically, and it's also not organized by the categories of the entries—the essays, performance scripts, and interviews are interwoven throughout and I ordered them in an athematic manner. I went through and read everything and pulled out various strands, and I tried to put them in an order that would bring people through the kinds of ideas and logics and the ways of working that are evoked in the texts. And then Roya Amirsoleymani and Kristan Kennedy wrote such thoughtful introductions to the book and Sarah Workneh wrote a beautiful foreword. I'm still processing it but it's really wild. Seeing my work digested and explored by other people who I admire so much. Another thing I've had the chance to reflect on—over these years as I did this writing, I often felt unsure of where I was going, wondering if I had gone totally out on a limb or severed my connections to my past work. But now, when Iread it all together, it's actually a quite cohesive set of ideas. There are different tendrils that go out into new places, but they always loop back to my central concerns. The earliest thing in the book is a lecture-performance called *Extremely Precise Objects of Ambiguous Use* (2011), which deals with religious ritual, and shared subcultures of nonnormative beliefs. Those ideas resurfaced in a really big way in the work I made for the Renaissance Society last year, *Brothers and Sisters* (2018), which drew on thinking about the Shakers and their understanding of craftsmanship as a form of prayer. It wasn't clear to me in the moment how much I have actually worked on a pretty limited set of questions and problems—

AK And maybe variations on certain themes or different approaches to the same thing. When you look at this collection do you feel a sense of closure? Or a certain sense of things being worked out, and wanting to move on to new questions? Or does it feel as if this is one particular phase of investigations that are very much ongoing?

GH It doesn't really make me want to move on to new questions, but it makes me want to be a lot more intentional and motivated around how I approach them. Most of the writing was done in response to invitations, and going forward I am planning on being more in charge of what I want to write about. There are historical artists I still haven't researched and written about that I really want to, like Beverly Buchanan, Louise Nevelson, Marc Camille Chaimowicz, Lygia Pape, and Melvin Edwards, to name a few.

AK I want to go back for a minute to something you mentioned about arranging sculptures and writing—the idea of "one of the right formations." I was thinking about some of the works you've made that involve pieces being taken apart and moved around—

GH Yes, the one you were in, *STAND AND* (2014).

AK Yes, and also the piece with the handheld objects—

GH *AND PER SE AND* (2016).

AK *AND PER SE AND* was for the most part an exhibition on a table top, and *STAND AND* was one multipart sculpture that was specifically made with the intention of being moved around, and had two bookends and—how many, six or seven?

GH Seven.

AK Seven moveable components that were stacked between large bookends.

GH Right.

AK So in a way that work is a great example of a work that to an extent dictates its own potential movements, in that it sort of looks like two pieces that are holding together a bunch of other pieces that are stacked in a row. But I'm looking at other pictures in your studio right now, the way some of your performances with your objects literally look like you are holding them, maybe almost about to move them but maybe you don't—and then I'm thinking about other artists who engage static or even more flexible artworks in ways that involve the objects being moved around within exhibition spaces. And it seems like that is a type of movement and a kind of performance that you seem to shy away from, almost as if the objects as you've installed them have their places that *they* really like, and *you* really like, and it's so considered, this order of objects—so intentional. But this makes me wonder to what degree spontaneity is something you think about or struggle with. I mean, I really don't think about much in your work as being left open to chance. Other than your encounters with objects that you might remake, for example.

GH Well, and the bodies of the other performers who aren't me. There is actually a lot of chance in that.

AK Oh, that's a good point.

Fold (III)
hand-dyed cotton

Foreground
Kneeling Object III (Poplar)
waxed carved poplar

Midground
Turned Hanging Bar (Beige)
laquered cast concrete

Background
Three-part Stool
(Cream, Beige, and Green)
cast concrete

GH Because people are so unpredictable.

AK Sure.

GH I do feel good in this universe I'm making, in which there are not a lot of unpredictable moving parts. But I think that's actually not the main thing. I am of course interested in what actually happens in the performances with the objects, but what I am almost more interested in is a viewer wondering about what will or did or could happen with them. I remember last time our crit group was here and we were talking about it, I was saying, "I kind of wish that the performances only happened when the museum was closed, and all the audience knew was that they do happen." And someone was like, "Well, why won't you just do that?" That's a degree of withholding that feels extreme even for me, but that feeling of looking at a thing and speculating about how a body would engage with it, speculating about its use—that feeling is more interesting to me than the performance, because the performances in themselves always already are only one possible option. So with the thing being moved, yes it can be moved from point A to point B, but it also could have been moved into a lot of other places, and I guess I am more interested in the wondering about it being moved. One of my favorite artworks is Imi Knoebel's *Raum 19* (1986), which is at Dia:Beacon. I've never seen it being rearranged— ever—I just know that I've gone and it *has been* rearranged. And when I see it and I know that it has rearrangeability as part of its fundamental identity, that feels really, really interesting to me and more compelling than watching a performance in which people rearrange it. Do you know what I mean? So there is that feeling of latency and possibility. To return to where this question started, do I want to live in a world without spontaneity? No, not at all. What I am interested in is always feeling that there is, at any moment, the potential for a lot of different actions or ways of understanding something to occur, and that even when that potential is not realized, the feeling of it—to be hyperbolic—that feeling of possibility can be the difference between life and death. Because you need to feel like even when you can't act on any of them, there are options, and if you don't feel like there are any options…

AK Then you're done.

GH You're just done. And I've been in that place rather often in my life. So I think that the feeling of possibility, even unrealized possibility, can be somehow more nourishing or vital than watching the possibility unfold.

AK And that's probably not an easy thing, for you to assume the mantle of a certain degree of control over the objects and their arrangement in order to maximize that effect. Do you know what I mean? It's almost like in order to set the stage for that feeling of possibility—and I'm specifically thinking about how a viewer might perceive things—it seems that one of the most significant aspects of your role as an artist working with sculpture, and working with performance, is to not be afraid to be extremely precise and possibly very controlling about your objects, and about your presentation of those objects. With the end goal of presenting something that is radically open and able to communicate a sense of openness. You are trying to sense the ways in which certain arrangements, certain shapes, and certain gestures can provide this sense of possibility. And in order for that to happen, you actually have to be very precise.

GH That's exactly right.

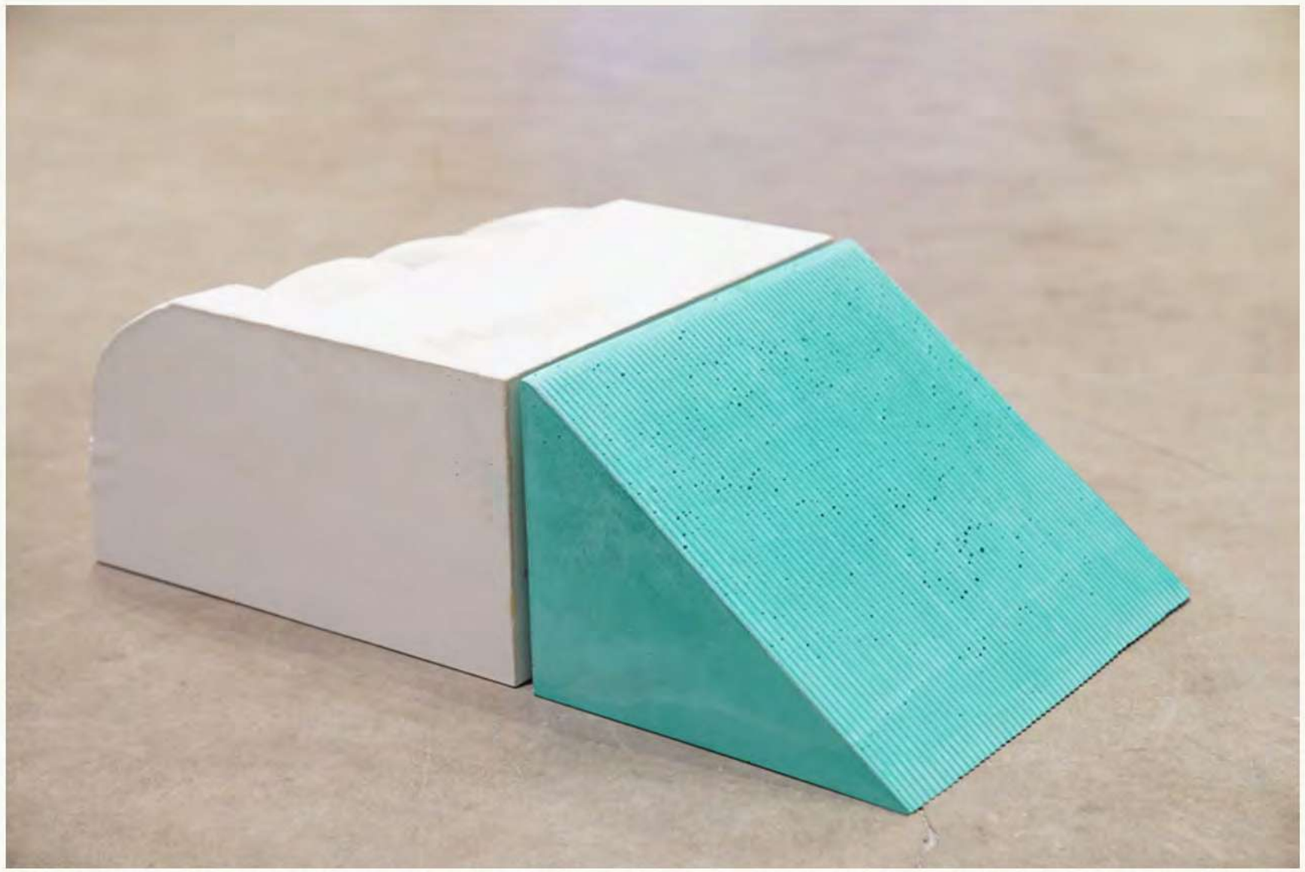
AK It's not a contradiction necessarily, but it's an interesting tension.

GH Thank you so much for articulating this, this effect I am hoping that the precision in my work produces. I like when people dress up for parties. Some people think it seems stuffy and pretentious, to dress carefully for even a casual get-together. To me, it seems, I guess, brave? When you dress up to go to an event, what you're indicating is that you didn't end up there by accident. You went home, you took a shower, you planned it out, you ironed your clothes, you went. And if it's not fun, if you end up standing there by yourself awkwardly, you can't pretend that you weren't excited to go. Because you were. And there's a vulnerability in that caring that to me has always been very moving.

Sitting (Brick Object) (III)
collaboration with Octavius Neveaux,
carved brick (performance still)

IN "SLANT STEP FORWARD," A 1960S THRIFT-STORE FIND LINKS TWO GENERATIONS OF ARTISTS

By *Dore Bowen* December 17, 2019 10:47am



Gordon Hall: *Two Part Object (After the Slant Step)*, 2019, cast concrete, two parts: 15 1/4 by 14 1/2 by 8 1/4 inches and 10 by 14 1/2 by 8 1/4 inches; at Verge Center for the Arts.
PHOTO SCOTT DUNCAN.

Cover of Phil Weidman's *Slant Step Book*, 1969, the Art Co., Sacramento.

In 1965 William T. Wiley purchased a steeply inclined step stool covered in green linoleum from a salvage store in Mill Valley, California, and gifted it to his student Bruce Nauman. The two artists became obsessed with the ambiguity of the "slant step," whose origins and function are still a mystery, and the object captured the imagination of numerous artists in their circle over the next several years. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Sacramento-based artist and poet Phil Weidman's 1969 *Slant Step Book*—a compilation of artists' projects inspired by the object—the exhibition "**Slant Step Forward**" honored this unlikely touchstone of 1960s art, bringing together works included in the book and in related shows. Curator Francesca Wilmott also commissioned seven contemporary artists to respond to the object, extending the artistic dialogue catalyzed by the slant step to a new generation. These contemporary works introduced a queer spin to the slant step tradition, which was dominated in the 1960s by heterosexual male artists.

Wilmott framed the show around *Slant Step Book* partly as a means of foregrounding the role of Sacramento artists in the slant step's history. The exhibition highlighted the work of local figures like Ron Peetz, whose *Slant Step X-Ray* (2004, based on a 1969 work) is an X-ray providing an interior view of the humble object.

The interweaving of the two generations didn't entirely convince, nor should it have. Though all the artists in the show took the same object as a point of departure, they used it to explore different concerns. Many of the early works are jokey, macho, and self-mocking. A 1969 mail-art work by Ray Johnson, *Duck Slant Step Pets*, maps the names of the figures involved with the slant step around a

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Whereas the slant step works from the 1960s are funky and experimental, the exhibition's contemporary responses (all 2019) are generally more conceptual, formally refined, politically oriented, and cognizant of the gallery space, using the slant step's awkward form to explore themes of gender trouble and body politics. Gordon Hall's *Two Part Object (After the Slant Step)* combines two concrete objects—one white and curved, the other turquoise and aggressively slanted—and was placed at the entrance to the gallery, where it could literally trip visitors, while Terry Berlier's "Nonorientable" sculptures consist of wooden Möbius strips that transform the angled step into circular bodies that rest lithely on pillows. Aay Preston-Myint's two "Untitled (Fetish Object)" sculptural collages turn the slant step into a glory hole, and soften the object's hard edge with purple draperies.

Aay Preston Myint: *Untitled (Fetish Object) I and II*, 2019, two mixed-media wall collages, each approx. 4 by 5 feet; at **Verge Center for the Arts**.
PHOTO SCOTT DUNCAN.

The handsome two-volume publication accompanying the show includes a facsimile of Weidman's 1969 book and an exhibition catalogue, the latter replete with essays and artists' texts, such as Hall's 2016 "Reading Things," which uses the ambiguity of the slant step to think through the North Carolina "bathroom bill" restricting bathroom access for transgender people. The publication's oppositional arrangement is perfect: rather than trying to suture the different impulses and aesthetics together, it emphasizes the distance separating these two generations and two world views, with only a step stool as a bridge.

This article appears under the title "Slant Step Forward" in the January 2020 issue, pp. 85.

Read More About:

Between Being and Becoming, A Review of Gordon Hall at the Renaissance Society

FEBRUARY 12, 2018 AT 8:30 AM BY JAMESON PAIGE

Gordon Hall, "Brothers and Sisters," performance at the Renaissance Society, February 4, 2018/ Photo: Meg T. Noe.

Becoming, being, and being with—this is the bodily vernacular of Gordon Hall's installation and performance, "Brothers and Sisters," staged at the Renaissance Society. An array of demurely sized but colorful new objects made by Hall, as well as one collaboration with Octavius Neveaux, are arranged throughout the gallery, sitting, leaning and folded along the contours of the space. "Leaning Object (Blue)," a long, slender cerulean cylinder precariously creeps up the wall, pivoting on its slight tilt off the floor. Not far away are the deep indigo pilings of dyed cotton titled "Fold (II)," which accumulate on the floor like an evenly paced tidal flow. Its dark pigmentation is interrupted by dusty residue or wear from prior touch; this object is meant to be used.

Hall's work has everything to do with leveraging the nuance of relationships and physicality, begetting the viewer to find comfort in the complexities of difference. Their work investigates abstraction for its ability to depict the particularities of bodies and genders, while not negating the power of opacity in our binary-obsessed society. "Kneeling (Brick Object)" potently embodies this simultaneous reach for recognition and illegibility. Composed of brick and mortar, the small massing is carefully carved away to reveal a gentle, curving form. The typically hard-edged geometry of stacked bricks

is confounded by the sculpture's deviantly supple surface. Unexpectedly, what is known to be hard suddenly appears soft. These surprising material incongruencies continue throughout the exhibition, suggesting touch (prior or impending), weight, pairing and use.

At 5:08 PM, dusk has slyly emerged and the event begins. Rather than performance, Hall names this time "in use." The hymnal splendor of an organ echoes throughout the gallery as the audience, lined on either side to directly face each other, waits to see what this liminal moment of the day reveals. The music ends and four choral vocalists bellow out a few seconds of a single note in unison. Their voices continue their momentary eruptions throughout, scoring Hall's movements. Hall rises out of the audience and moves to delicately lean face-first against the gallery wall, the tip of their nose flexibly accommodating the immensity of the architecture. A series of repeating, machine-like movements begin to unfold. The repetition of a cycling right arm, and then a left, rolls into the casual succession of swinging leaps across the gallery. Soon after, Hall stands with arms extended. They strangely curl their left hand and release, only to ball the right one into a tense fist. After cycling through the choreography, Hall begins again. Each run includes the surprise of a new movement or connection to a sculpture.

Gordon Hall, "Brothers and Sisters," performance at the Renaissance Society, February 4, 2018/ Photo: Meg T. Noe.

The pace of these movements vary–some are quick, others slow and subtle. They also entail various ways of applying pressure, caressing, and becoming. This choreography signifies a set of relations. This aim is perhaps most obvious in Hall's plank-like mimicry of "Digits" or the beautiful bending of their torso into the sculpture "Seat (Yellow and Beige)." In these moments there is a glorious bodily and affective confusion that rides on relationality–does Hall want to challenge these objects, lie beside them, become them or vice versa?

Framing this affective and haptic expansion is Hall's thoughtful conjoining of repetition and expectation. Judith Butler tells us that norms are constituted through repetition, so that normative expectations become substantiated by actual behaviors. Indeed Hall revels in the repetition of their movements, but seemingly more so in the slippages. Even more satisfying is how the audience is taken along in this relational revelry. We were left hoping that what might flow out from Hall's soft machinic energy are new ways to use something. Especially if that something is our own body and its relations. (Jameson Paige)

Gordon Hall performed "Brothers and Sisters" at the Renaissance Society on February 3 and 4, 2018.

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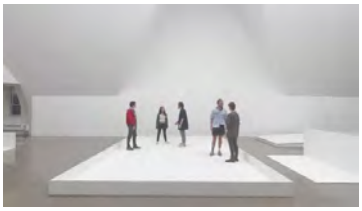

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ARTFORUM

INTERVIEWS

GORDON HALL

May 11, 2018 • Gordon Hall discusses *The Number of Inches Between Them* at the List Center

Gordon Hall, *The Number of Inches Between Them,* 2018. Performance view. Gordon Hall. Photo: Cassandra Rodriguez.

Gordon Hall's The Number of Inches Between Them, *2018, replicates a found sculptural bench and serves as a platform for choreography. It is on view at the MIT List Visual Arts Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, through May 20, 2018. Below, Hall addresses their integrative approach to object making and performance.*

THE SHOW AT THE LIST CENTER, which includes sculptures, a letter, and a performance, is quiet and slow. I think of it both as a space of grief and a space *to* grieve. The performance features four people in their seventies and eighties, who sit on and use a concrete bench in a variety of ways.

A couple of years ago I saw a picture of a beautiful and weird bench in my friend's grandparents' yard in Clinton, New Jersey. I went there to look at it, finding it even more compelling in person. My friend's grandfather told me that he bought it from an artist in the 1980s, and that it was an artwork. It took me several months to find out that the artist was named Dennis Croteau. Through research and speaking to his friends, I learned about his life and death from AIDS in 1989. So, this project, in which I make replicas of this found bench sculpture, became one of getting to know an object as well as a person. I had already been thinking about furniture, bodily vulnerability, and our reliance on platforms and structures generally and also in the work of Scott Burton specifically, another casualty of the AIDS epidemic in that same year, whose furniture sculptures and performance works interrogated the legacy of Minimalism. The title of this work—*The Number of Inches Between Them*—originated from a quote from Scott Burton about the experience he desired for the seated audiences of his "Behavior Tableaux" pieces, "...what I want people to become aware of is the emotional nature of the number of inches between them."

While I was developing this project, Congress was attempting to repeal the Affordable Care Act. I kept hearing politicians say, "*If* you get sick, you'll need health insurance." This word *if* really hung in my ears, *if* and not *when*, as if illness and disability were exceptions and not facts of all lives—a fantasy of eternal able-bodiedness and autonomy. I was already asking myself questions about what kinds of responsibilities we have to each other, physically, symbolically, and societally, in terms of supporting each other. The intimacy I established with Dennis's bench became a way of reflecting on support while physically making an object of support. I remade the bench twice, assembling one of them like the original and leaving the other in its component concrete parts leaning around the gallery's walls, a body taken apart and put together.

[video]

Gordon Hall reads a letter to fellow artist Dennis Croteau

Alongside my elder performers, I also perform with the bench, draping my body over it in a memorized and repeated series of poses. All of it is orchestrated to slow down our attention spans. I've always been committed to that. Especially this past year, a deep perceptual fatigue and an inability to process what is happening have made me more committed to making work that does not mimic that kind of pacing or attention economy. I don't want to bore people, but I am interested in pushing viewers right up to the edge of boredom to see what is possible when there are just a few elements and the piece is moving along slowly. I ask my audience to do some work in order to have a meaningful experience —this work isn't intended to entertain.

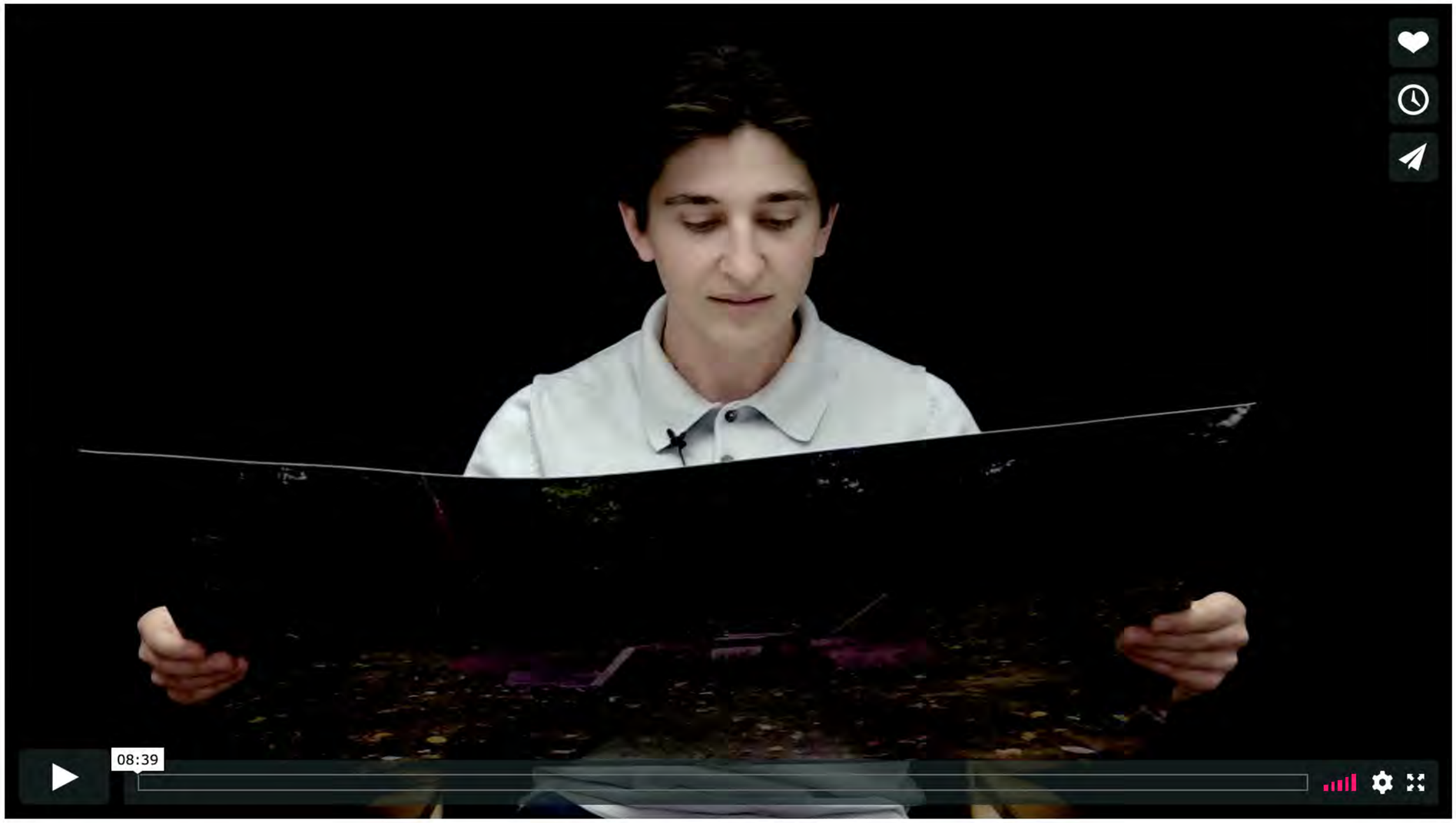
In *Brothers and Sisters*, a recent performance at The Renaissance Society, I performed a repeated phrase of movements with slight variations, moving among and interacting with a group of my sculptures that were arranged around the gallery space to create a path for my movements. Each phrase originated in one of the sculptures, and then I strung them together into a sort of body-sentence, writing with objects and movements. I am curious about what it means to be watched by others, to present my non-traditional body to the gaze of strangers. I have thought about this in a few ways, including in terms of what I have called "reparative objectification" in "Party Friends," an essay that I wrote about the years I spent partying in Chicago and the life and death of the artist Mark Aguhar. There is also an erotics in the way that I (and the viewer, I hope) relate to the objects—a bodily relationship that aims to produce intimate, hard-to-recognize body feelings. I came to sculpture through being a dancer, and so I make the objects with my body and then figure out what to do with them using my own and other people's bodies.

I have a lot of faith in our ability to change the way we understand what we are looking at and feeling. With this project in particular, the rather futile act of recuperating just one largely unremembered life by getting to know this artwork and piece of furniture feels important. The scale of the loss is so great that it's more of a gesture toward attempting to enter that loss somewhere, with someone—and to do this by getting close to an object, understanding its design and developing a relationship with it and with the past as a result.

I make sculptures that are meant for actual or imagined movement with bodies. The space between, where the furniture meets your body, that little gap that closes when you sit down or touch something—that's what I get excited about. With this object, I didn't go out searching for a bench. It's like having a crush on someone or the way you can imagine exactly what the body of someone you've slept with feels like even when they're not there.

— As told to Daniel Quiles

ALL IMAGES



Gordon Hall reads a letter to fellow artist Dennis Croteau

For more, check out an interview with Hall, here. Hall's exhibition “The Number of Inches Between Them” is on view at the MIT List Visual Arts Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, through May 20, 2018.

FRAME

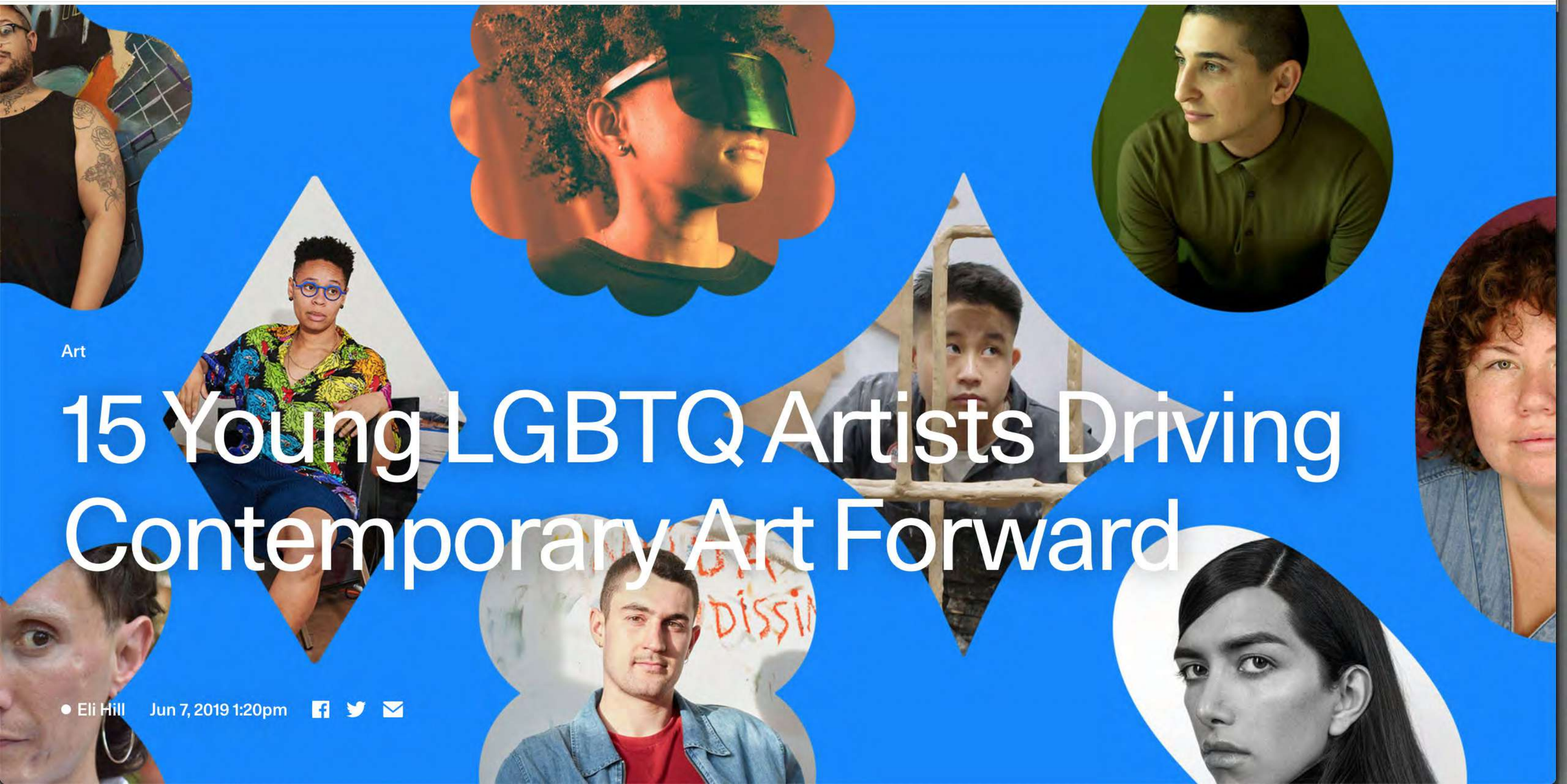
Gordon Hall
Night Club
B21

Working in both sculpture and performance, Gordon Hall's work investigates the formative relationships between bodies and objects. Concerned with the effects of past use–relations on our present with objects, their future - oriented practice in particular seeks the potential of abstract, three-dimensional forms to produce alternative forms of embodiment.

'The Unset' series is a group of sculptures made to be arranged in an infinite number of formations. Fabricated from joint compound (aka drywall) which has been pigmented and carved, tile mosaic, and painted and raw poplar, the series is modelled after the forms of real and figurative objects: book-ends, tablets, punctuation marks and architectural elements. The objects are balanced against one another and the walls, creating object-based 'sentences' with the potential to be reiterated again and again. The work is accompanied by a script written by Hall that will be performed once a day by the artist and Night Club's Matthew Steinbrecher, which Hall also intends to be read aloud by visitors after they leave.

Gordon Hall
Born 1983
Lives in New York, USA

Gordon Hall received their MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2011. Recent and forthcoming solo presentations include Temple Contemporary, Philadelphia (2016); Foxy Production, New York (2014); and Night Club, Chicago (2014). Recent and forthcoming group presentations include: Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2015); Chapter, New York (2015); CCS Bard, Annandale-on-Hudson (2015); White Columns, New York (2015); Brooklyn Museum, New York (2014); SculptureCenter, New York (2012); and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2010).



Art

15 Young LGBTQ Artists Driving Contemporary Art Forward

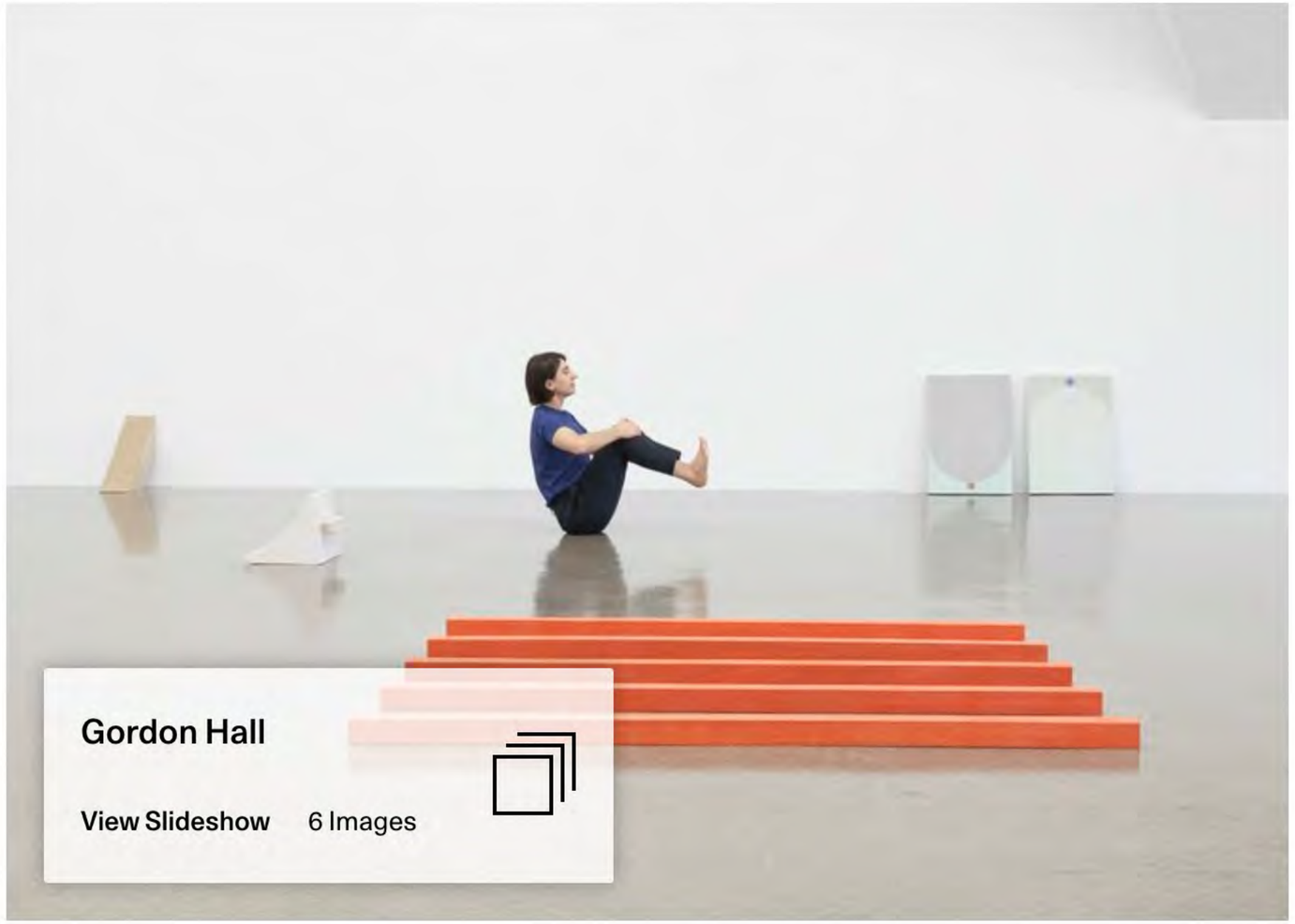
Eli Hill Jun 7, 2019 1:20pm

Art that is produced by members of the LGBTQ community is too often framed by the artist's gender or sexuality. Labeling an artwork with its maker's identity is a painful oversimplification of the artist and their art. And while many LGBTQ artists incorporate their lived experiences into their work, it is important to remember that their output should be treated as separate from their body and identity.

Below, we share interviews with 15 artists on the ideas behind their work, their motivations, and their most recent artistic endeavors. Each artist is included not because of their identity alone—but due to the compelling and incisive work they create. For those looking to celebrate members of the LGBTQ community who are pushing contemporary art forward, read on to learn about the dynamic practices of these innovative artists.

Gordon Hall

B. 1983, Boston, Massachusetts. Lives and works in New York City.



Can you talk about your connection with the history of Minimalism, and how you do or do not address it in your practice?

I've spent a lot of time reading and looking, and Minimalism isn't actually a cohesive historical thing. Though there might be formal similarities, the artists are all quite different from each other and had different ways of understanding what they were doing, which are often quite contradictory. My favorite "Minimalists" are the ones who have been less remembered—Anne Truitt, Fred Sandback, Beverly Buchanan, Franz Erhard Walther, Scott Burton, Richard Artschwager, John McCracken. All of them were utterly different from each other.

To whatever degree I make sculpture that is formally restrained, quiet, precise, slow, I think it is for two reasons: I think that these can be used as strategies of refusal of representation and auto-biographical narrative (as many of these artists I just mentioned used them). And second, I yearn for focused spaces of co-presence with objects and bodies in which I am not as overwhelmed as I am in the regular world, so that I can look and feel my way around.

Can you speak about how your work critiques, or responds to representation?

Can you speak about how your work critiques, or responds to representation?

Representation of non-normative bodies and identities within artworks and institutions is incredibly important, but I think that's just the beginning of what we need to be thinking about. As a transgender artist, I am thinking more about the ways that we can refuse these forms of naming, taxonomizing, and classifying bodies. I look to art—both making it and viewing it—as a method for relearning how to perceive bodies in ways that are more expansive, unstable, and consensual.

I make objects and performances that aim to trouble our desire to name and to know "what" things are. I am especially wary of the ways institutions position artists with "differences" in hyper-visible situations that often involve performing with our bodies, essentially serving as evidence of our inclusion, as a way of making up for all the ways these institutions have and continue to fail to actually support these artists' careers over the long-term. I do my best not to participate in curatorial contexts that are singularly concerned with representation without engaging the underlying questions about practices of seeing and the politics of support.

ArtSeen

GORDON HALL *AND PER SE AND*

By Dana Kopel and Jody Graf

ON VIEW
Temple Contemporary, Tyler School Of Art
January 14 – 22, 2016
Philadelphia

It has become a commonplace within contemporary art discourse to speak of placing objects in "conversation" with one another. In Gordon Hall's *AND PER SE AND*, held at the Temple Contemporary, this phrase is stripped of its curatorial affectation and retooled, amplified.

The exhibition is comprised of a long narrow plinth, a stage of sorts, upon which twenty-three "hand-held" sculptures interact in carefully considered geometries. Most speak a familiar minimalist vernacular of cylinders, blocks and spheres. Others flirt with the representational or symbolic registers: two half-moon slivers double as a pair of oversized parentheses; small pink "shims" approximate rubber erasers; a lump of clay carries the imprint of the fist that once held it; and, in the only instance of straightforward figuration, a cast claw holds a small sphere in its talons. Each sculpture is scaled to fit in the artist's hand, and the touch of this absent hand—caring, gripping, erotic—extends throughout, suggested even in the unyielding wood and plaster surfaces of these objects, most of which have been sanded down, caressed,

into their hard, smooth complexions. Together, they construct what Hall terms an "object sentence": a carefully composed lexicon of abstract forms that slip in and out of recognition. Balancing illegibility with extreme specificity, it is a language that we feel we both do, and do not, already know.

Hall developed these objects in concert with twenty-three passages of text, culled from a variety of sources spanning Wikipedia entries, essays by Judith Butler and Roland Barthes, personal correspondence, and family word games. The affiliations and discrepancies between these two lexicons—object-based and linguistic—were made manifest in Hall's hour-long lecture-performance. In a dissolution of the boundary between event and object characteristic of Hall's work, the exhibition doubled as the set for this performance, the sculptures as its props. Material stasis is rendered inherently anticipatory: it is simply the state prior to potential activation.

In the performance, each textual fragment corresponded to a combination of objects, which Hall methodically laid out in precise but improvisatory arrangements: visual sentences, perpetually rewritten. Projected live onto a large screen behind the plinth, each arrangement served as a formal counterpoint to its companion text, which

Gordon Hall, *AND PER SE AND*, 2016. Wood, joint compound, wood filler, cast cement, colored pencil, acrylic and latex paint, denim, hand dyed cotton, modeling clay, tile mosaic, 13 x 23 x 36 feet. Performance with projected video and sound 58 min. Photo: Stephanie Lynn Rogers.

counterpoint to its companion text, which the artist read aloud. The texts, alternately colloquial, theoretical, and poetic, reveal an intense investment in language itself: its component parts, its grammatical rules and normative structures, and the way these might be rearranged or undermined. The last textual passage doubles as an explanation of the exhibition's title—"and per se and" was the proper spelling for &, the ampersand, which was historically considered the last letter of the English alphabet—and in doing so draws attention to the ways in which language mutates over time. Other fragments comprise a list of palindromes (PULL UP IF I PULL UP, NEVER ODD OR EVEN—the latter also served as the title of Hall's 2015 exhibition at Foxy Production) or a pair of phrases repeated ad infinitum, building to a circular yet accumulative logic.

This aggregative energy is reflected in Hall's emphasis on those parts of language that suggest states of merging or becoming, such as prepositions and conjunctions, rather than those, like the noun, that offer definitional or ontological certitude. One textual fragment, for example, comprises a modified version of the exhibition's promotional material; stripped of all nouns, verbs, and adjectives, the resulting sentences are rendered abstract, heavy on the tongue. Language becomes something to be pushed, shifted,

heavy on the tongue. Language becomes something to be pushed, shifted, reconfigured—literally, in the case of the wooden parentheses, for example, or more figuratively in the structure of the palindrome, in which the order of letters serves not only to produce meaning but also to create a formal structure. In this sense, language is at once malleable and divisible into a set of solid, constituent segments, a status mirrored by the "object sentences," which emerge from a fixed vocabulary yet are unceasingly rearranged to generate new meanings.

Gordon Hall, *AND PER SE AND*, 2016. Wood, joint compound, wood filler, cast cement, colored pencil, acrylic and latex paint, denim, hand dyed cotton, modeling clay, tile mosaic, 13 x 23 x 36 feet. Performance with projected video and sound 58 min. Photo: Stephanie Lynn Rogers.

By setting up two parallel lexicons, linguistic and object-based, and allowing them to merge or displace each other, Hall, it might be alleged, undermines the communicative clarity of both. Yet the work evinces a real investment in and care for these languages. By breaking down and reworking them, the artist suggests alternative potentials for language and form, for what they can do beyond standard usage. Not simplistically utopian, Hall's work reimagines what's possible with what's already at hand. This process generates a productive ambiguity in which normative structures—not only language but gender, a longstanding

which normative structures—not only language but gender, a longstanding concern within Hall's practice—are reframed as sites of intervention against seemingly legible or fixed norms. Hall states at one point during the performance, quoting Édouard Glissant, "We demand the right to opacity," suggesting that indeterminacy itself can be political. If *AND PER SE AND* prompts a reexamination of relationships between language and object, the tangible and the immaterial, the new understandings produced might allow for a theorization of gender as simultaneously physical and virtual, embodied without being intrinsically tied to particular body parts and their normative coding.

Contributors

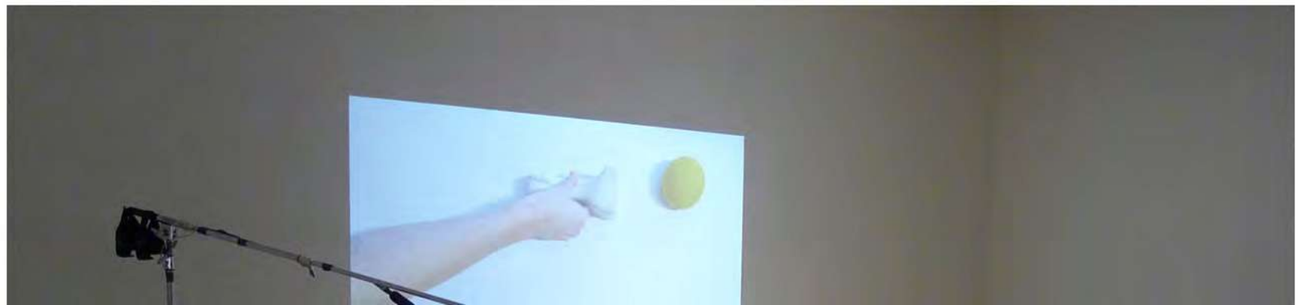
Dana Kopel

Jody Graf

ART

Learning to Read Objects Like Letters

Meredith Sellers January 21, 2016



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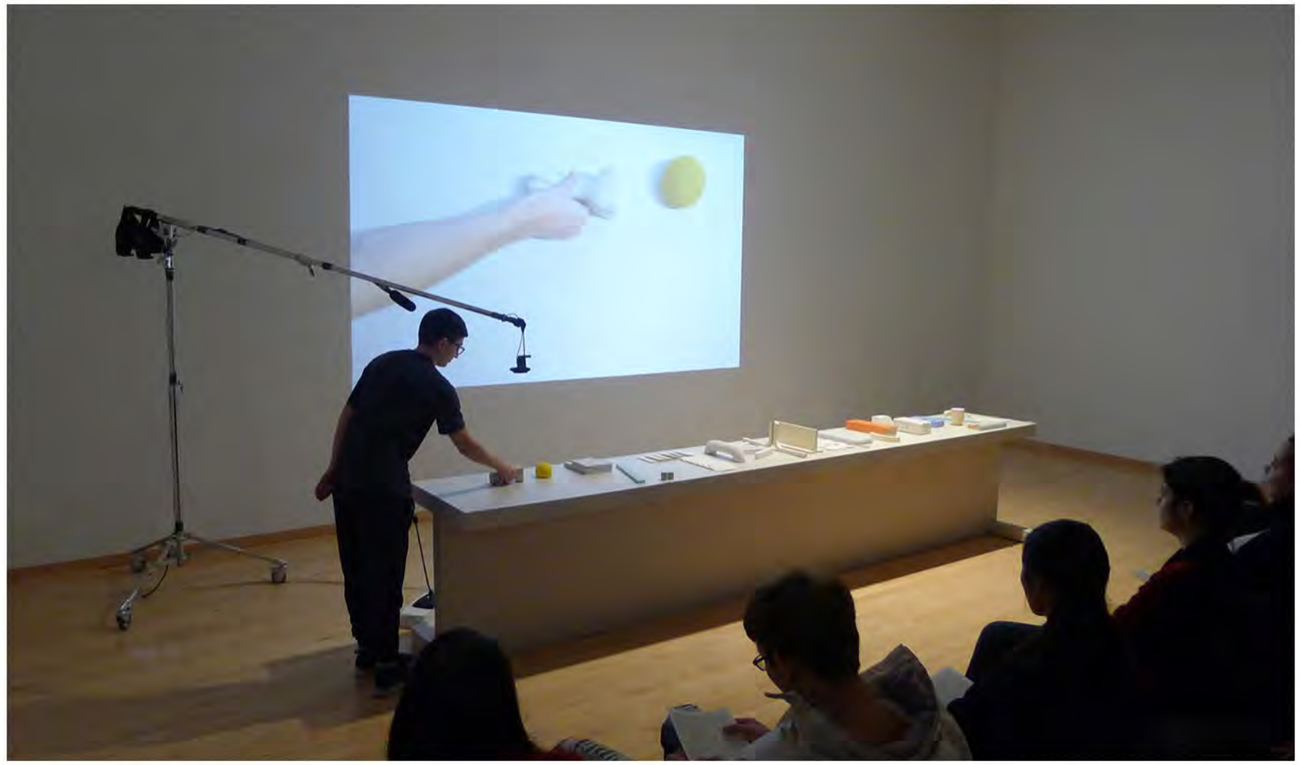

Gordon Hall performing “AND PER SE AND—A Lecture in 23 Tufts” (2016) (all photos by Stephanie Lynn Rogers unless otherwise noted) (click to enlarge)

PHILADELPHIA — The “I”-shaped table is set up as if it contained a presentation of recently excavated artifacts. Objects cover most of it — small, soft geometric shapes in many neutral shades and a few punches of yellow, blue, or vermillion. A camera attached to a crane hovers over one side, projecting a live feed of the grey, blank space underneath it, the only part of the table not filled with objects. Each member of the audience has been handed a program that consists of a series of numbered footnotes, with references as varied as “transcript of text messages with Willy Smart” and “Excerpt from Roland Barthes, ‘The Grain of the Voice,’” all printed twice: right-side up and upside down. The artist appears wearing sweats and a T-shirt in slightly different

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one side, projecting a live feed of the grey, blank space underneath it, the only part of the table not filled with objects. Each member of the audience has been handed a program that consists of a series of numbered footnotes, with references as varied as "transcript of text messages with Willy Smart" and "Excerpt from Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice,'" all printed twice: right-side up and upside down. The artist appears wearing sweats and a T-shirt in slightly different shades of grey. Unobtrusive, like so many of the objects laid out on the table.

This is Gordon Hall's "AND PER SE AND—A Lecture in 23 Tufts," a new sculpture/performance/experimental lecture for Temple Contemporary from the non-binary wunderkind, who has recently shown at venues including SculptureCenter, Foxy Production, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Whitney. As the performance begins, Hall selects a few objects, a stack of thin, white, geometric forms that look like rectangles with the edges rounded off or angled out. They move at a steady clip, neither fast nor slow, and with deliberation and care spread the stacked shapes out like a strange tarot deck in the blank space of the table (and thus onto the projection). They pull a pile of notecards out of their pocket and begin: "The – that holds together the parts of the sentence is cumulative … You connect the details accretively, as they – one after the other. A succession of views that 'oozes at the edge of words,' I weigh each – in my hand." I read the first footnote, which tells me the quoted text is a pause-laden, cut-up reconfiguration of words from Hall's performance last May at the

Whitney, now become a set of instructions for viewing the performance I'm watching tonight.

Gordon Hall, "AND PER SE AND" (detail, 2016), wood, joint compound, wood filler, cast cement, colored pencil, acrylic and latex paint, denim, hand dyed cotton, modeling clay, tile mosaic, performance with projected video and sound 58 min, 13 ' x 23' x 36' (click to enlarge)

Hall shuffles the geometric stack and returns to the other side of the table to select another object: a pair of "V" shapes, facing opposite directions. "Seeing myself in photos, my hand up in a claw, my talon, resting, grasping. Putting my phone in there just to give it something to hold onto. Always gripping, holding on holding on." Next comes a white, curved object, like a large handle but with the texture of confectionary icing. Hall reads, "Another interpretation is that the ball symbolizes a polished river stone being held firmly by a crane, who stands diligently over her nest. Resting on one leg. With the stone held mid air by the other, the mother crane watches over her young and would awaken quickly if she were to fall asleep and drop the stone." Hall selects a cylinder with a rounded bottom, places it below the handle, and says, "I give you my word." Hall clears all the objects, carefully placing them back in their original spots, before choosing another and starting again.

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I try to follow the footnotes, while the objects take on the esoteric meanings ascribed to them by Hall's words, as if they were shifting shapes before my eyes. Many of the sculptures have referents in everyday items, resembling perhaps a handle, a cup, a brick, or a lemon, but they are none of these things exactly. Hall quotes a line about gardening from Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, and the spotted triangular piece of paper projected on the screen nearly transforms into a bed of flowers. It's a kind of linguistic alchemy. I listen and watch, trying to decipher the objects as if they were hieroglyphs, characters that look familiar but can't quite be understood. Two curved shapes appears almost as parentheses, but turned on their sides; another set could be oblique punctuation marks. The gathering of a yellow ball, a set of blue squares with holes in the middle, and two pink wedges flits on the screen as Hall quotes interviews with artist Scott Burton and writer Ursula K. Leguin. Hall's hands move with a delicate determination, not quite caressing the objects they made. Each grouping is a fleeting assemblage, calling to mind Erwin Wurm's *One Minute Sculptures*.

Gordon Hall, “AND PER SE AND” (2016)

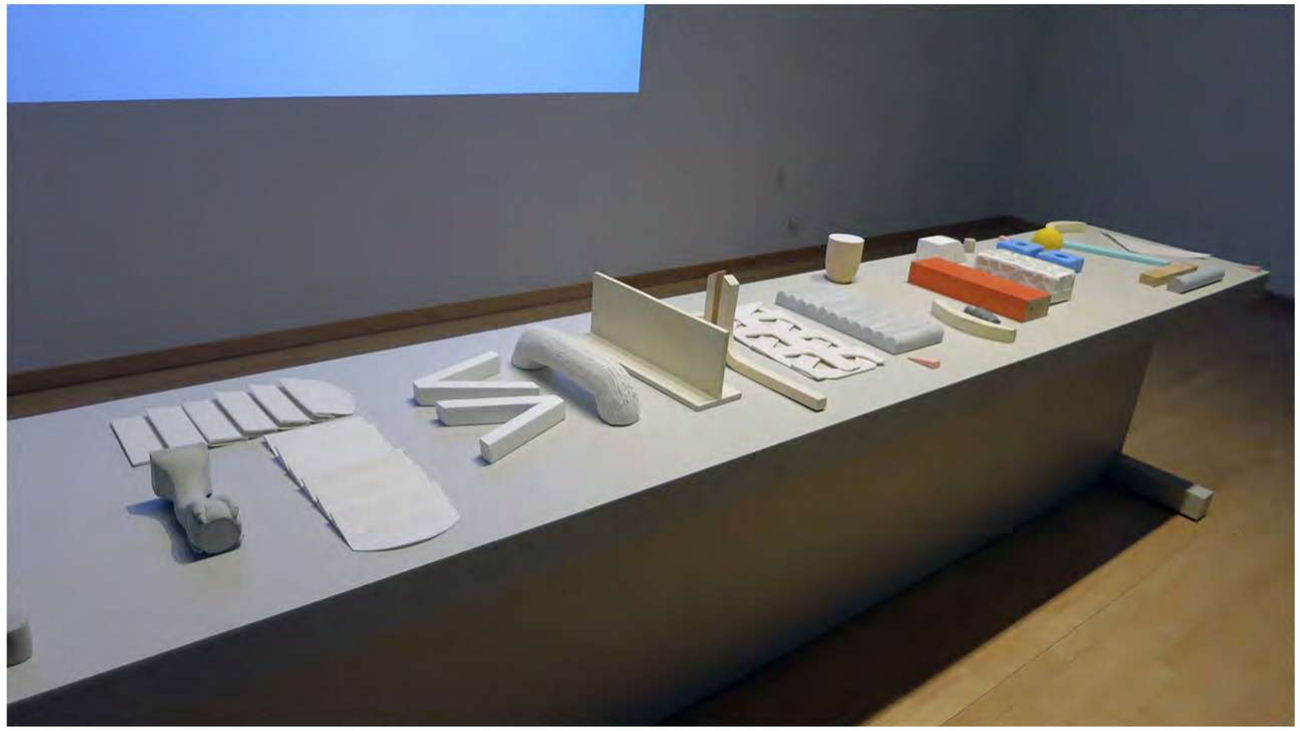
The work’s title, “AND PER SE AND,” is derived from a Latin portmanteau of the letters “e” and “t” or “et,” otherwise known as “and.” Hall explains in the 23rd “tuft” (as they refer to each sculpture/quotation in the series):

> Medieval English-Latin dictionaries sometimes taught spelling not letter by letter as we do but syllable by syllable. When an English

> Medieval English-Latin dictionaries sometimes taught spelling not letter by letter as we do but syllable by syllable. When an English letter, like I, formed a word by itself, it was spelled *I per se I*, which is Latin for *I by itself is the word I*. In the mid 15th century, the & symbol was added to the alphabet as a letter after z, as it was common in print—so you would say *w, x, y, z, &*. Since the symbol by itself was a word, it was, using the system of syllable spelling, spelled *& per se &*... But the four words *and per se and* were gradually slurred together into one word, the contraction ampersand, which in the early 1800's became recognized as the official word for the & symbol.

Hall's exploration of changes in the history of the alphabet offers a way of talking about their own ambiguity regarding finite categories of gender; it's also as a way of discussing the fickleness of so many of the systems that govern our everyday lives and identities. If the alphabet, a system we think of as fixed and timeless, is in fact a construct subject to change, then why shouldn't our ideas of gender as fixed also be subject to change? Is a cup really a cup, or does it just look like a cup? Is a lemon really lemon, or just a lemon-colored, lemon-sized round object? Assumptions can be made, only to be broken. Although the performance was at times opaque, it's one of Hall's most obviously personal pieces to date, in scale as well as in content — in addition to artists and academics, Hall also quotes themself. "AND PER SE AND" first moves forward, counting its way down through 23 sculptures paired with 23 quotations, then backwards, counting up, requoting them all. You follow along, recognizing some of the referents, beginning to associate them with specific objects, retraining yourself to

them all. You follow along, recognizing some of the referents, beginning to associate them with specific objects, retraining yourself to find meaning in these peculiar combinations of words and images. It feels like learning an arcane foreign language. “AND PER SE AND” allows for a strange and pleasurable cognitive dissonance, and leaves you wondering what use there ever was in having binaries to begin with.



The table set for Gordon Hall’s “AND PER SE AND” (2016) (photo by the author for Hyperallergic) (click to enlarge)

Gordon Hall: AND PER SE AND *is on view at Temple Contemporary (2001 N 13th Street, Philadelphia) through January 22. The performance took place on January 14, 6pm.*

GORDON HALL

By *Ian Edward Wallace* November 29, 2014 7:02pm

View of Gordon Hall's *DOUBLE III (STAND AND)*, 2014, pigmented joint compound, wood and hand-dyed cotton, two parts, each 27¾ by 18 inches; at Foxy Production.

For **Gordon Hall**'s first solo exhibition at **Foxy Production**, the **New York**-based artist presented a series of precise, minimal sculptures and site-specific works that made veiled reference to objects of traditional American culture. Giving simple, hand-crafted works the stolid aura of historical artifacts or objects of worship, Hall makes sculptures that, like this show's palindromic title ("NEVER ODD OR EVEN"), ultimately close in on themselves, forming circuits of connotation rather than offering definitive meaning.

Embedded in two opposite walls of the main gallery were two clear resin pegs (together titled *Double [II]*, all works 2014)—copies of the wooden wall pegs produced by the famously ascetic Shaker communities of the rural Northeastern United States in the mid-1800s. Placed on a low plinth on the floor was a folded triangle of hand-dyed yellow canvas (*Fold*), suggesting a monochrome facsimile of the ceremonially folded American flag. These not-quite-copies of cultural objects bear the reminiscences of historically charged traditions and rituals, but without the characteristic qualities (in one case the material of wood, in the other the stars and stripes design) that give the original objects their symbolic power.

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Hall offered three variations on doubling as a means of creating further apperceptive challenges. Against one wall leaned a stack of white forms resembling rectangular painting palettes, made from chalky joint compound (*Double III [Stand And]*). Nearby, another stack—identical to the first but made of sewn and folded canvas—lay flat on the floor like a pile of deflated headstones. In the back gallery, a pair of mosaicked ceramic benches (*Stools*), one with the distinction of a slight curve, solemnly faced each other. A second furniture-sculpture pair consisted of a wooden stool found in Madison, Me., arranged at a right angle to a slightly altered replica built by the artist (*Double [I]*). Hall's handmade replication of a readymade item rebuffs the power of mechanical reproduction in favor of a sustained and sustainable tradition that might outlive it. As a whole, the show indicated the artist's interest in investigating the narratives of history and identity immanent to objects.

At a glance, there didn't appear to be any works on the walls of the two rooms. But in fact, Hall had painted sections of them differing shades of off-white, creating ghostly patches that were detectable only when the light hit them from certain angles. On the floor of the main gallery, hugging the corners of the room, were geometric sculptures made of wood and pigmented joint compound (*Set [IV]*, *Set [V]*, *Set [VI]*). These had brightly painted facets that reflected halos of color onto the walls. A strip of non-drying modeling clay, marbled green and white, spread from floor to ceiling along one edge of a supporting column in the center of the room (*Middle [II]*). Together, these shifting touches of color offered a counterpoint to the weight of the floor-based works on view. In its polarity between the ephemeral and the concrete, the exhibition traced the wide spectrum of narrative elements that materials can embody.

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