



The Number of Inches Between Them

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STEEL HOUSE PROJECTS/WINTER STREET WAREHOUSE

Rockland, Maine

August 4–26, 2017

Performers: Mary Bok, Gordon Hall, Alan Crichton, Del Hickey, Susan Schor,
Millie Kapp, Chris Domenick

Part I

Introduction

Elizabeth Atterbury
and Meghan Brady

As artists living in Maine, we are grateful for the space and time that our long winters and way of life allow. However, we have wanted to cultivate a deeper exchange within the community on our own terms. It is from this place of self-sufficiency that we invited Gordon Hall to collaborate with us. We were drawn to Hall's work for its straightforward poetry as well as their use of performance as a way to explore the broader issues raised by bodies, aging, formalism, gender, and human connectivity. In the fall of 2016, we received a grant from the Kindling Fund to work on a project with Hall, to be administered by SPACE Gallery as part of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Arts' Regional Regranting Program.

From the beginning our roles were clear: We would act as facilitators and hosts and Hall would make and present an entirely new large-scale sculpture and performance titled *The Number of Inches Between Them*. Hall fabricated the sculptures at their studio in Brooklyn while we scouted locations for the exhibition and performance and worked through logistics in Maine. Hall then joined us with the works at Hillside Farm in Camden for three weeks in July and August of 2017.

Hall's sculpture consists of two replicas of a bench made in the mid 1980s by the largely unknown and now deceased artist Dennis Croteau. The bench was commissioned by Ira and June Kapp of Clinton, New Jersey, where Hall encountered it with the Kapps' granddaughter Millie Kapp in the fall of 2016. One of Hall's replica benches was exhibited as the individual panels leaning against the walls of Steel House Projects in Rockland. The second bench was temporarily assembled in the barn at the farm, where Gordon developed and rehearsed the performance. This bench was moved to the Winter Street Warehouse in downtown Rockland where it was reassembled and, on August 11, used in the 45 minute movement piece by Hall and the group of performers, who included Mary Bok, Alan Crichton, Susan Schor, Del Hickey, Millie Kapp, and Chris Domenick.

After the performance, Hall orchestrated an evening of lectures and performances, which took place at Hillside Farm. Building upon Hall's ongoing project *The Center for Experimental Lectures*, this program was open to the public and intended to encourage a broader conversation about art production and artist communities. The presenters in this event, who are members of Hall's New York-based critique group, originally came together as performers in Hall's 2014 piece *STAND AND*. This group has been influential in the development of *The Number of Inches Between Them*. The members of this group who were present with Hall in Maine were Chris Domenick, Juliet Jacobson, Stephen Lichty, Andrew Kachel, Millie Kapp, RJ Messineo, Colin Self, Mariana Valencia, and Georgia Wall.



The evening unfurled easily, mixing together long-time collaborators and strangers, farmers and urbanites, young and old. The tone was ceremonious, reflective, and unaffected. As the light changed, the attendees followed the artists' presentations from a drawing exhibit in the hayloft to a performance of a short play in the greenhouse. One artist, with alluring music and poetry, led observers through the barn to the edge of the pasture. There was a song in the driveway, photocopied drawings handed out under the chestnut tree, and a frenetic movement piece involving almost all performers. And finally, a statement read by Hall. Backlit by the lights from the porch, Hall stood on the lawn and read a short reflection on their physical and emotional experience of *The Number of Inches Between Them*. In their eloquent and to-the-bone way, they ended by saying, "I did not realize until this week that the project's critique of self-reliance and of the myth of able-bodiedness was taking place on a much smaller scale in its fabrication and installation. In the midst of feeling so powerless in relation to all this weight, I realized that I had made something that forced me to be taught, yet again, that I need lots of many kinds of help. The sculpture itself was teaching me, with my body, the thing that I need to know: No one ever does anything alone."

No one ever does anything alone.





Four Inches

Alhena Katsof

My trip to the Winter Street Warehouse was a characteristic summer outing. I made the drive from northern Vermont to Maine in a borrowed car with Benny by my side. We stopped at a friend's house on the coast for dinner, fell asleep drunk, and ate bacon in the morning. We continued along Route 1 and arrived with just enough time to get coffee. We talked along the way. Our worries about money, aging parents, and artistic work were exorcised as we drove down the sleepy highway. When we arrived at our destination, we argued about parking.

The Winter Street Warehouse is a large room with a cement floor and red brick wall, the latter of which became the backdrop for the event. The vaulted ceiling is made of wood—beautiful, husky lumber. Upon entering, I surveyed the crowd (well-sized for an August afternoon), recognized a handful of friendly faces, and then gathered some handouts that were available on a table by the door. Audience members had begun to sit on the ground and were waiting quietly or speaking to each other in soft tones. I stationed myself at the front and felt the rest of the room fill in behind me. Together, our bodies formed a halo between the warehouse walls and the edges of the performance space.

Occupying the center of that space was a lone sculpture comprised of shapes in the suggestion of trapezoids and triangles. Each of these shapes was unique—length, height, form—but made of the same concrete material. Some of the shapes supported a nearly rectangular slab, which lay horizontally across their tops. There were no visible joints or screws holding the piece together; instead the shapes fit around and slipped into one another as though they could come apart once again like a puzzle. It would have taken many hands to carefully lift, shift, stabilize, and untangle them. I realized too late, when Maine was already a clump of pines in my rearview mirror, that a second version of the sculpture was simultaneously installed at Steel House Projects across town, and precisely in this state. There, the puzzle-like components were disassembled, propped, and leaning on the walls of that space like solitary, angular bodies. It would have taken just as many hands to carefully lift, shift, stabilize, and put the pieces into place, which is how I encountered the sculpture at the warehouse already assembled for our viewing.

As I scanned the room, I noticed that the artist Gordon Hall was seated a few paces away, on a folding chair that had been set up along the perimeter of the room. Hall was sitting next to an elderly woman with short, grey hair and I wondered if the woman was perhaps the artist's mother. Eventually, Hall and the woman stood up and walked together to the "front" of the room and then turned to face the sculpture. My

eyes locked on Hall's hand, which sat on the woman's shoulder, gentle but firm. When their hand released and physical contact ceased, the woman walked alone towards the sculpture. Perhaps that's when the performance began, though it may have already, elusively, done so. At center stage, the woman turned around to face Hall and took a seat. And with that simple gesture, the sculpture became a bench.

That the sculpture was indeed a reconstruction of a bench, which the artist had fabricated out of pigment-dyed cast concrete, and which weighed a literal ton, is something I will return to momentarily. My attention, at the time, was on Mary Bok, who sat quietly and gazed out at us with hands folded in her lap.

Mary sat as though she was waiting for the bus before cell phones kept our fingers busy. She sat in quiet contemplation. I knew that the woman seated before me, who steadfastly transformed sculpture into bench was Mary Bok, because one of the handouts announced each performer's name in order of appearance. This was also where I read about the bench on which Mary sat. Taking glances at Mary, in between reading, I found out that the bench is part of a series of objects which Hall creates by replicating one-of-a-kind pieces of furniture. This particular piece is based on a geometric stone bench that they "encountered" at a private residence in New Jersey. I take this to mean that Hall did not seek out the bench through an elaborate research process, but rather, happening upon it, was inspired to re-fabricate it, in order to get to know it better. I imagine the artist exploring the bench with fingers and eyes, feeling and prying along each seam, line, and crevasse. Measuring, touching, and re-building: Hall transformed furniture into sculpture.

The words "sculpture," "bench," and "furniture" appear throughout the text. The object is at once all and none of these. As if to underscore this last point, these words are not used interchangeably, per se. Each invokes a unique set of meanings that are employed to complement and agitate the writing's subtext. In doing so, both Hall's exhibition text and artwork espouse the power and potential of operational ambiguity. The words "sculpture," "bench," and "furniture" are also therefore central to the performance, which it should be said took place without any words being spoken, uttered, or whispered at all.

Mary Bok sat quietly on the bench for about five minutes. In that time, I could hear the occasional car door closing in the distance and an engine revving. These sounds floated in through the windows. Otherwise, the town and the audience were quiet. Mary was concentrated on her breath and sat in stillness—evoking a meditative state. In time, Hall, who had been seated and attentively watching, stood

up. When Hall rose, Mary stood up too, exited the circle, and sat back down in the folding chair at the side of the stage.

Hall's hand releasing from Mary's shoulder and Hall quietly standing: a set of simple cues such as these belied movements and compositional shifts throughout the performance. These legible, tempered gestures included, for example, eye contact made between the performers (and not necessarily with Hall). These methods of communication were engaged throughout the performance so that I felt held and part of a discernible rhythm.

After Mary sat down, Hall entered the circle, walked towards the bench, and began to slowly assume, briefly hold, and then release a set of consecutive positions, eventually weaving their body together with the bench, laying it bare as a support structure.

Moving into form, assuming one position and then another, each one held for a few quiet moments. The movements in between the positions were careful too, tender, sturdy, measured, studied, and economical. These "in-between" movements were as deliberate and important as the positions themselves. I remember Hall's hands, which were not seeking, but sturdy. These were not the movements of a body engaged in casual improvisation, but rather, an exhibition of poised entries and exits, in and out of form, by someone who has entered and exited before, in this sequence, many times.

Moving from one posture or position to another—these positions were at times submissive, athletic, contemplative, and sorrowful—Hall slowly traversed the structure, from left to right. Holding and releasing 16 positions overall. Take this for example: The side of Hall's body facing the front of the room, giving me their profile. Gordon's knees bent so that their body could lean forward, torso resting on the thighs, ass high, arms reaching around to meet at the hands, which are turned upwards towards the sky. Hall's head rested on the bench, right earlobe down, making contact. Facing towards the front of the room, towards me, with eyes shut. It's the final pose. When it was over, Hall stood up and walked off.

The art historian David Getsy once summarized his interest in what he calls "queer abstraction" as "the valence of sexuality in artworks and performances that would not, at first, seem to encourage it."¹ This feels like a poignant framework for Hall's performance, though perhaps not (only) in terms of sexuality, but also in terms of intimacy. The kind of intimacy that welcomes, nay more so, knows sex.

It is the kind of intimacy that is revealed through the instinctive touch of lovers. When you sense that people have slept together because of how they hold hands—knowingly and familiar—or the way one person leans their head on another's shoulder as if they've rested in that crook before. This is an intimacy that is revealed by the

1. Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy, "Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation," *Art Journal* 72.4 (Winter 2013): 58–71.



2. John Howell, "Acting/ Non-Acting: Scott Burton [interview]," *Performance Art Magazine* 2 (1979): 9.

anticipation of the weights and folds of another's body, as we navigate the subtle moments of public life within reach of one another.

When Hall finished the series and exited the stage, Alan Crichton arrived and began to jog around its circumference. Middle aged, kindly, and focused, Alan intermittently jogged and walked until, panting gently, he sat on the bench to catch his breath. When he was composed, he stood and walked out of the circle. Hall, who was standing ready in the wings at stage left, entered the circle again, walked towards the bench, and began to slowly assume, briefly hold, and then release the consecutive positions, moving through the sequence of poses and traversing across the bench once more while holding my attention rapt.

There was another round like this. Del Hickey and Susan Schor entered to sit, stand, and lean on each other. Their movements were concise, attentive, and still. At times they were together—walking around the stage with fingers locked—and in other moments, each person seemed engaged in their own, attentive activity. In time, Chris Domenick and Millie Kapp joined in and for a moment they were a group of four bodies moving in, around, and on the bench. When Del and Susan exited the circle, Chris and Millie stayed on exploring the space with youthful vigor. They stalked the stage while looking at each other intently. Sitting on the bench, they stomped and banged their feet. When Hall entered the circle and began the sequence again, Chris and Millie walked off leaving Hall to finish alone, quiet again and silky.

At some point, I realized that the movements of the performers echoed the kinds of activities that people engage in, around, and on benches in parks. They run nearby and sit to catch their breath. They meet, talk, chat, and argue. They stretch, read, flirt, cruise, fuck, and meditate. I think about park benches and how they are often sponsored in someone's honor, typically the deceased. Frequently, they sport little plaques that mark the dedication with brief epitaphs like: "In loving memory of Bob, whose favorite thing in all the world was to sit and watch the birds from this spot" or "In memory of Bob and John, who loved this park and one another." These public declarations of love reveal intimacies that might be maintained across a sea of absence. I am reminded here of the title of Hall's work—fittingly shared by the performance and the sculpture—which was inspired by the late artist Scott Burton who, before he died from AIDS-related complications in 1989, once said of his *Behavior Tableaux* works: "... what I want people to become aware of is the emotional nature of the number of inches between them."²

While these thoughts were passing through my mind, Hall continued to slowly move into, hold, and exit from supple postures that



were at once vulnerable and revealing. These movements charted the sculpture and its histories, Hall's relationship to it, and perhaps, by extension, to us as well.

*

Later that evening, the audience of the performance was invited to eat dinner at the nearby Hillside Farm in Camden where Hall's critique group had been meeting for a weeklong residency. Afterwards, we attended some casual readings, screenings, and performances organized by the group, which were staged in the barn, garden, back yard, greenhouse, and driveway. In the early evening, before the sun had set and the bug spray was out, my friend and I were in the kitchen. There, we talked with Octavius, a soft-spoken artist who had been cooking for the group during their stay at the farm, as well as Mary Bok, who it turns out is the woman of the house. We got to talking and Mary told us about her life on the farm as well as her experience during the performance. She recounted how nervous she was to sit in front of everyone. And that when she began, she realized that she was simply sitting, and everyone in the audience was sitting too, and somehow, when she realized we were all doing so together, she was catapulted to a very deep, new place. Mary began to feel her body rise and float above the bench, four inches between them.



We Do Not Work Alone; 16 Positions on 16 Positions

Lydia Adler Okrent

1. Gordon Hall, "On Vulnerability and Heavy Objects: a reflection by Gordon Hall," *The Chart*, Summer/Fall, 2017.

1. *Lying on the floor, face down, arms outstretched with hands on the edge of the bench, toes curled under.*

A heavy sliding door opens to reveal the raw interior of an old barn in Rockland, Maine. Outside is a bright pastel summer sky, inside is a dim and shade-chilled hollow. I walk across the concrete floor toward the only object in the room. Lit solely by the diffused sun rays streaming through the windows is Gordon Hall's sculpture. The sculpture, a bench comprised of eight large shapes of poured concrete, each piece the lightest pink, has been placed in the center of the barn and encircled by a white chalk outline delineating where I end and the action of the performance begins. The eight heavy pieces come together like a three-dimensional tangram, one dense shape abutting and supporting the next.

Each piece of the bench is the weight of a human at a different age, the 45 pound piece a small child, the 180 pound piece an adult, the 320 pound piece an adult and child, perhaps, huddled together. All together the sculpture weighs about 2,400 pounds. But, it is dead weight. The bench is asymmetrical and the hardware joining these heavy pieces is invisible, giving an illusion of precarity. In fact, the bench *can* and *does* support. Sitting on the bench we can feel at ease, its sole purpose is to support us. Yet, in that very same breath we might gulp with the fear that it could all come tumbling down with a body-crushing force.

2. *Lying on the floor, arms and legs spread to the side, palms down, cheek on the bench, head facing front.*

Hall says "Since the project's inception I have been understanding it as a contribution to a conversation about bodily vulnerability and support, about our bodies' relationships to objects and furniture in illness or disability, hinging on the question of whether or not we have a collective investment in providing for one another's basic needs."

In the car with some fellow thirty-somethings a few days later, a friend asks all five of us if we are in pain. After a moment, four of us say yes. After another moment, the fifth person, who that day had been bitten on the calf by a dog, says no, and then, after another moment passes, changes his response to yes. Within the seams of our bodies there lies an inevitable pain, quiet in some, loud in others. It may not be consistent, it comes in waves, but it is there, when we sit in cars, when we take care of a friend, when we perform, when we celebrate.

We mustn't romanticize sickness and vulnerability. Though my language verges on the poetic, debility is not a poem. The heaviness

and chill of Hall's bench cuts through romanticism and creates a level surface upon which we engage with the reality of vulnerability and care. Through the careful combination of corporeality and sculpture, Hall merges politics and aesthetics.

3. Flipped around the other way, on all fours, feet on bench and knees on floor, hands open and facing one another.

I circle the room searching for a seat. I want to find a position for myself where I can lean my back up against the brick wall. I find a suitable perch on the concrete floor; it's not cold exactly, but it isn't warm. It is dusty. I let my weight fall back into the wall behind me. I have my right leg bent and my left leg extended straight, toeing the white chalk line. I'm thirsty. My left knee aches. I switch the positioning of my legs a few times, Goldilocks searching for the easiest way to be in a body. I ask myself if I am comfortable enough to sit in this place for the entirety of the performance. I don't know how long it will be. I do a scan of my body, there is some pain here and there. I look around at the shifting sitting bodies surrounding the bench as we wait for the piece to begin.

4. On the bench, knees folded under, elbows out, hands grasping the corners, head down towards the floor.

A tangram is a Chinese game whose original name, 七巧板, literally translates to "seven boards of skill." Though the origin of the European name "tangram" for the game is a bit murky, it is alleged that the '-gram' comes from the Greek γράμμα or "written character, letter, that which is drawn."

5. Folded at the waist over the side of the bench seat, butt on the floor of the bench, calves and feet on the seat of the bench, arms forward with hands holding the body up, head facing over the top of the seat.

The first to enter the stage and approach the bench is Mary Bok. Mary, with purse, comfortable shoes, comfortable slacks, soft tuft of grey hair, comfortable top, sits on the bench, facing the open sliding door and Hall who stands beyond the white chalk line but still within my sight. Mary's position on the bench softens as the minutes go by. Her shoulders shift slightly, the after effect of the process of stacking herself up from feet to head. It takes effort to sit! Her breathing is steady. Her body is held by the bench and she lets it hold her (afterwards I will learn that she was nervous that it might not). She sits as long as it takes for her weight to

fully enter the bench and spread to the edges. I imagine the cold concrete warmed by her body. How long would we have to use this bench before it shows wear of our using? Or is the very nature of concrete that we cannot make impressions on it? The bench makes its impression on us. The backs of her knees. Her hand folded over the edge. Afterwards Mary tells me she felt meditative.

6. Sitting on the bench, folded over downwards, hands resting in one another near the feet, head down.

Hall and I talked about the language of the healthcare debate in which people on all sides often ask what will happen "if you get sick." The use of "if" is unnecessarily and falsely optimistic. We will get sick! There is no doubt here! Everyone sitting in this room, the audience and the performers, will all experience varying degrees of debility and vulnerability throughout their lives. To be alive is to be in a constant pas-de-deux with the health and the wellness of ourselves, and our communities. This dance is often followed by a sudden death, or the slowly decaying body in or outside of the hospital setting, surrounded by medical equipment, our communities, our debts.

7. Lying on the bench seat, knees bent and feet toward the ceiling, arm hanging down over the edge with hand resting on the floor, head turned to the back of the room.

The performance is punctuated by 16 poses which Hall repeats in between the activations of the other performers. When Hall talks about the positions, they do so with impressive exactitude, as though describing the detailed construction of a sculpture. The 16 poses create a chorus to the action. A refrain. (The refrain, the repeated phrase. To refrain, to stop yourself.) Hall remains in contact with the bench throughout the 16 positions. Their body is an arrow, a line, an arch, a bridge, a quotation mark, a comma. A "written character, letter, that which is drawn." Through the repetition of the positions, Hall becomes signs and symbols, fleshing out a language of display. Though they climb all over the bench, it seems that their body is an outline to the features of the bench rather than supported by the bench. Carefully, they show us its cold lines as they caress the edges. Every precise motion has a distinct beginning and end. In the stillness between shifts, we take it in, seeing new angles and folds in the bench and Hall's body. Pose 10, they are on top of the bench. Knees bent, head and torso angled downwards as though in prayer. Moving from the 14th to 15th position they inch their way beneath the length



of the bench, a caterpillar inching through park grass. The last position, Hall bends over the bench and lowers their right ear towards the 320 pound piece, a pecking at the surface. Hall's body traces the sculpture and shoves at the boundaries without relying on it. The perceived youthfulness of Hall's body, the presumed capability of their bones, allows for *inches between* their flesh and the bench.

8. Lying flat on the seat of the bench with upper body extending out over the edge and hands folded on the floor; head down.

From start to finish, the bench and the performance could not have been made alone. Hall needed other bodies to carry the bags of cement into the studio, to pour the concrete, to lift each piece of the bench, to position each piece, to assemble the whole, to perform in the piece, to watch the piece, to write about the piece, to read the writing. Self-reliance is a fallacy. Or, perhaps more optimistically, self-reliance only comes as the result of the reinforcements of our communities and objects of support. We are always reliant on something.

9. Same as the last pose, but with the arms folded and elbows pointing out, head horizontal.

An older man gets up from his seat and starts walking briskly around the bench, close to the audience. One foot in front of the other, slowly picking up pace until his walk transforms into a steady jog. He is breathing carefully and intentionally, not to evoke or perform but to facilitate the running. He slows down when he needs to; I listen to the sound of his feet hitting the floor and imagine it reverberating back towards his head. Concrete is not a forgiving substance. But, he knows how to carry himself. He slows when he tires, catches his breath, and begins to run again. Eventually, presumably because he has exhausted himself, he sits down on the bench. His eyes are looking below and then above me. Not for affect or effect but for utility. It's just where he wants to look. His hands land in his lap, he is holding his pointer finger in his right hand. Holding himself, a comfort, a self soothing.

10. On hands and knees on the seat of the bench, calves angled up with feet flexed, hands grasping the sides of the bench, head down but face not touching the seat.

In the days when chairs, in the form of thrones, were reserved for kings and queens, benches were the seat of the commoner. Scattered

throughout American parks and lining city sidewalks, benches are often placed in commemoration of deceased members of the community. A bronze plaque on the backrest of these benches declares the deceased's name and years lived. The weary and the waiting sit on these benches and prop themselves up against loving memory.

11. Torso flat on the bench, arms stretched out over head, fingers spread open, palms and head down, legs spread open hanging off the edge, feet supported by folded over toes on the floor.

Hall learned that Dennis Croteau, the artist who made the original bench in Clinton, New Jersey, was an artist who died from AIDS in 1989. This realization pushed Hall's work deeper into the realm of vulnerable bodies and precarious care. The AIDS crisis was a failure of care. While at the same time, as Hall says, "a remarkable instance of smaller scale self-organizing and support." The self-organized process of making and constructing the bench is a shortening of the inches between the individual and the community. I want to know who helped Croteau pour and stir the concrete? Who helped him sell the bench? Who folded each of the eight parts into soft protective fiber in order to transport the bench to the house in New Jersey? Once there, did he assemble the bench alone? No he couldn't have, he too would have needed others to help hoist the material out of the truck and into position. Who were the bodies that helped him in his process? *How* were the bodies that helped him? There was a community effort involved in the construction of the bench in Clinton and again in Rockland. In both instances, reliance became a form of resilience.

12. Folded over the edge of the seat, arm outstretched along the narrow surface of the vertical bench extension, head down, other arm folded on the square, knees on the floor.

Del Hickey and Susan Schor, two more of the "senior movers," as Gordon refers to them, approach the bench. There is a sensuality to the way they place their bodies on the bench and let it hold them. I learn about the strength of the bench from the weight of their bodies. Their positions are a collage of odalisque and warrior as a slack arm falls, rests on top of the other's strong shoulder. They share the bench as they move through bodily layers, shapes, supports and angles. Volatile bodies moving in front of me and for me. Their bodies will never behave exactly as intended, yet they let them behave exactly as they are. I try to find their nervousness (I look for a shaking or a quivering) but I can't find it. I don't think I have ever felt that calm.

They, like the other senior movers Mary Bok and Alan Crichton, appear to be emptied of artifice. They are not performing anything other than what and who and how they are. Watching them navigate the bench, the cold floor, the eyes of the audience, I am reminded of a Deborah Hay quote, "To invite being seen playing awake within the vast terrain of my scintillating cellular body requires scrupulous monitoring of the whole body by the imagination. By necessity, thoughts occupied by fear, self-judgment, or judgment of others quickly vanish."² Through the necessities determined by their age, physical abilities and vulnerabilities, these senior movers appear emptied of fear.

13. Back up on the seat of the bench, legs folded and tucked behind the triangle, arms folded at the elbow, hands grasping front side of bench seat, head down.

There are seven performers. If you count the bench there are eight. It takes four people to lift the largest 320-pound seat onto the legs, which are simultaneously nudged into precisely the right position by four more people. Leading up to the performance, the eight pieces of the bench will have been lifted and assembled and lifted and disassembled eight times. This collective dance of reliance, vulnerability and support, to a count of eight, happens before the performance even begins.

14. Sitting in front of the bench, feet on the floor, legs folded under, knees underneath the seat, arms holding onto the seat of the bench, head down into the seat.

Millie Kapp and Chris Domenick enter. *Ab the facility of youth!* Walking quickly, they circle the bench, nearly synchronized. They are primed and able-seeming bodies and we don't doubt them. They move in a deliberate way, adept at fulfilling the task at hand. The foot here, the eyes there, the weight between, centered and sure. Moving through a score they've learned, a series of sitting postures, they are sculpted and know exactly how and where to be. They are rhythmic in the movements between postures. They work together and against one another, like a game of rock paper scissors, at random pulling out postures from memory as they systematically position their bodies on top of the bench. They mirror one another in the expressivity of their movements. They look at and touch the bench as artists. I project my experience as a performer onto them.

To perform is to exist between states, to be at the ready, to be in flux, to be engaged in the act of doing, to be taken away or aback by the act of making, to be viewed, to be in process, to make seen, to make

2. Deborah Hay, *Lamb at the Altar/The Story of a Dance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 18–19.



3. Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 3.

something felt, to transform feeling into action, to make the intangible almost tangible, to give over to, to give, to rely.

15. Lying on the floor under the bench facing up, head turned to the back, arm up with hand holding onto the bench seat from below.

I imagine building a pillar in commemoration of support by taking each of the performers and all the people involved with the bench's construction, and stacking them on the bench, one on top of the next. Their volatile bodies press into one another as they are organized into a pileup of laps. On the edges of the pillar I etch:

"Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place."³

16. Standing next to the bench, legs bent, arms behind, check touching the seat of the bench.

The work transforms as it stretches and constricts in inches. The number of inches between me and the performance. Between Croteau's bench in New Jersey and Hall's bench in Maine. Between the eight bodies nudging the pieces into position. Between Mary Bok seated on the bench and Gordon Hall standing in front of her. Between Del Hickey's head and Susan Schor's knee when they settle into a stacked pose atop the bench. Between the impact of concrete and the reverberations through Alan Crichton's body. Between the memory of the movement and the execution of the seated pose. Between Hall's flesh and the surface of the 320-pound piece of concrete. Between me and the throbbing of my left knee.



Assembled From Parts to Make a Whole

Elizabeth Lamb

Between the artist and the object

I have followed Gordon Hall's work over the past couple of years and watched the development of their sculptural forms and subsequent performances which emerge from them. Hall makes static objects crafted in relation to the architecture of their body and layers them with movement, texts, and events in collaboration with others. *The Number of Inches Between Them* continued this trajectory. The work was organized into three parts—the exhibition, the performance, and an evening of readings and performances with contributions from Hall's New York based critique group, all of which took place in Camden, Maine, during the summer of 2017.

Over a phone call leading up to the project, Gordon spoke about their relationship to ideas of support. Gordon told me that five years ago they vowed they would not make a work that they could not physically lift on their own. I recalled earlier work, such as their 2014 exhibition *NEVER ODD OR EVEN*, in which relatively lightweight materials—wood, tile, and joint compound—were used to create objects in proportion to the size of Hall's body, or the series *AND PER SE AND* from 2016, in which individual sculptures were small enough to fit in the artist's hand. We talked about the intimacy of learning about an object so well that you can recreate it, and the experience of attraction, specifically an attraction to an object. I remembered Hall's *Double (I)* from 2014, a small found wooden stool and its replica, sitting side by side, perpendicular to one another.

Like *Double (I)*, *The Number of Inches Between Them* began with an attraction. This time the object was a bench in the yard of a friend's family home in New Jersey, made in the mid-80s by a largely forgotten artist named Dennis Croteau, now deceased. Hall replicated Croteau's bench twice, using pigmented cast concrete. In Hall's exhibition, a photograph of Croteau's bench, included as a take-away poster, shows the bench sitting among trees, in a grass clearing surrounded by fall leaves. The bench is made of eight pieces, cast in concrete with a rough surface, a minimalist geometric structure assembled from parts to make one whole.

Between Mary and me

It is already almost midnight when I reach the farmhouse. An excited group of artists welcomes me into the house, including the members of Hall's New York-based critique group and the Maine-based artists hosting Hall's project. Hall gives me a tour. From the kitchen we head up through the narrow stairway leading to the second floor, where

bedrooms in a long corridor host two to three of the guests each, in the beds and between them, nestled on the floors with bundles of blankets mixed with unpacked clothes. The rooms look cozy and familiar. The main floor consists of the kitchen, a dining area, the main entryway, an office, and the living room, each leading from one to the next through consecutive doorways. The tour ends in the far room at the edge of the house, a quiet living room with a fireplace at the center of the far wall.

The windows are dark, lined with house plants, green leaves, and ruddy succulents lit in the dim glow of old lamps. On the floor is a little bed; the sheets are flannel on a flat mattress. A set of two books has been laid next to the pillow. Hall explains that our host, Mary Bok, had selected these books, thinking I might enjoy them. Though I won't meet Mary until later, I am fascinated thinking about the person she must be, learning of her personality through her absence and in the objects in this space. I want to know more about the characteristics of our host who would open up their home for Hall's project to a set of artists, a group of strangers.

In the morning daylight the residence is transformed, full of anticipation for the afternoon and evening performances. I gather my things, and observe Mary's organized piles and papers. Next to the Kleenex box is a novelty post-it, something I might find on my mother's desk, that reads, "I'm not messy, I'm organizationally challenged." I feel kinship, a warm affection towards this person. I learn Mary's son is Gideon, who is a painter and teacher, and married to one of the project's organizers, Meghan Brady, who is also a painter. I learn that Mary is an accomplished author of short stories and fiction, and is a member of the creative communities in the region. I also learn Mary is one of the four local senior participants in Hall's performance to take place later that afternoon.

I make my way to the kitchen where there is a breakfast prepared by Octavius Neveaux, a Brooklyn-based artist (and Gordon's partner) who has been making meals for the group throughout their week-long retreat. I introduce myself to a few new faces while navigating toward the coffee. From the stairway Mary enters the kitchen. There is a fragility in her step as she enters the room. Her face is round and light behind her glasses. Hall introduces us. Our conversation continues as we sit in the screened porch. I learn a little of Mary's life growing up in this farmhouse, and then later raising her own family here. I learn about her love for horses and Welsh Corgis. I thank Mary for her generosity and for welcoming me into her home.

Between the house and the artists

Nearby in the back lawn, Millie Kapp and Georgia Wall rehearse from a script. I overhear them discussing adjustments. Later I see them in the empty greenhouse, standing on the tables with RJ Messineo, as the three of them investigate the space and search for available equipment to mic and amplify sound. I explore the property. Walking up the trail to the raspberry bushes I pass the barn, which is filled with hay, tractor equipment, and machinery that looks like it belongs to another time. The perimeter of the yard is filled with vibrant peach and yellow irises.

In the lofted area of the barn Chris Domenick is pinning rubbings on large sheets of paper onto the wood walls and structural beams. The accumulated words and phrases on the papers shift groupings of familiar language pulled from American monuments into new sets of meaning. I learn about the barn cat that Chris befriended and we talk about the light that will be in the space once the public arrives. We talk about the hiking trailhead not too far from the farm and the two trail options to choose from. I remember the tourism brochure I picked up at the Portland bus station on my way to Rockland that described Camden as the one place in Maine where the mountain meets the sea.

In the kitchen I meet Juliet Jacobson and we decide to go on a hike together. On our climb we discuss the differences between performance and dance, and her artistic practice of drawing and observation. As the mountain gains in elevation, I have trouble catching my breath and feel embarrassed by my efforts. Simultaneously I am excited to be moving in a way that requires me to breath so heavily. At the top we find a clearing and pick a few of the small wild blueberries. We talk about how what artists make is intimately bound up with the people around them, the sites of their labor, and the many forms of support that make the completion of the work possible—the journey to see it, the people around it, and the space in which it took shape.

It is time to head back down to the farm, as Juliet needs to go into town to make photocopies for her contribution to the program that night—a paper handout with her drawing of a cutting board on one side and a short story on the other reflecting on the care embodied in the shared meals made by Octavius. I look forward to arriving in Rockland a bit early, with enough time to view the exhibition of Hall's work at Steel House Projects. Juliet and I each eat three berries and leave one on a rock on top of the mountain.



Between the bench and the audience

We arrive at Steel House Projects, the location of Hall's exhibition *The Number of Inches Between Them*. The gallery is lined with eight stone-like slates of varying angular shape and size. The forms rest on the grey floor and lean against the white walls. A close investigation reveals the subtle shifts in color between each object. Spaced approximately ten inches apart, mostly a milky off-white, some the faintest cast of rose quartz pink. Their acute angles, like directional signage, point your gaze across the otherwise empty room. On the wall next to the entryway there is a thick stack of take-away posters on a shelf. Looking closely at the poster's image I am able to identify the shapes in the room, to understand and recognize them as replicas. I think about the heaviness of each form, and what would be required to fit the pieces into Croteau's weight-bearing configuration.

From the exhibition I map the route to the performance space at the Winter Street Warehouse. RJ, Juliet and I walk the mile between locations. A straight line down Main Street. We arrive at the warehouse, where people are gathered along the entry and interior walls of the building. A large open space with Hall's second bench, assembled, resting in the center. I am struck by seeing the object in real time. I have seen the form as a photograph, and laid out in pieces, but to see them assembled as a whole, in this new space, feels like seeing a relic. The eight cast concrete pieces are a warmer shade of light pink, each piece lying next to, onto, fitting into the adjacent shapes. Here the assembled parts become one body, sitting proud on the smooth cold cement floor. In the open space the bench seems to glow and float, its pale color contrasting against the dark grey floor and deep brown brick walls.

Between the performers and the bench

The performance begins with Mary Bok walking slowly to the center of the room. Bok wears a jacket, a blouse, straight slacks, and carries a handbag. The back of her legs touch the bench as she lowers her body to take a seat at its center. Resting her hands in her lap, she sits waiting. The room feels suspended in her sitting. She crosses her legs at the ankle, her breasts are heavy, as they fold against her belly. She sits reverential, staring forward into timelessness. I feel my attention held in the stillness of her performance. Bok continues to sit, holding us, her presence anchors the audience in the room. At this point Hall stands up outside the edge of the circle, an action that prompts the end of Bok's score. Bok gathers her bag and walks forward, away from the



bench to her seat among the audience in the outer circle. The residue of Bok's performance permeates the room.

Hall moves towards the bench and begins the first of three sequences, each made of 16 positions. Hall lies face down on the floor, placing their hands on the base of the bench. Hall's movements are methodical. Curling up to mold their body to meet the shapes and angles of the objects, Hall charges each surface with each new position. Hall's body and the bench's body are in conversation. Positions that are open, loose, and vulnerable oscillate between tight closures and controlled shifts. Hall pushes up, their face close, touching the bench surface, as though to smell, to make contact, to investigate the form. The movements make clear that Hall has an intimate knowledge of the object's construction. Hall's hand holds the edge facing the front of the room. Hall's touch releases to roll their body beneath the bench panels and crawl out backwards with their face down, arms behind. After completing the sequence, Hall stands to return to the perimeter of the space and sits down there.

Alan Crichton's steps are audible as he enters the performance space with white hair and blue jeans. As he circles the perimeter of the space his breathing becomes labored, his pace quickens to a run before he walks again, running short half laps and returning back to walking. Crichton leans down to adjust his pants, creating more room in the bend of his knee. Crichton sits atop of the longest flat plane of the bench, he is breathing heavily, his hands rest in his lap with his gaze shifting between forward and down. He sits, waiting until his breath has returned to normal and then exits the performance space, becoming again a member of the audience.

Two women walk around one another and the bench. Del Hickey and Susan Schor appear to be the youngest of the senior performers. One stretches out her hamstring like my 7th grade science teacher Mr. Miller had a habit of doing on the front row of desks. Hickey and Schor sit back to back, their gaze shifts upwards and out, then down toward the floor and the bench. One of the pair straddles the lowest platform surface of the bench's open space. Their weights shift, they lie down, heads cradled in their hands. One toe curls under, the other foot rests on top of the lower level of the bench. Hickey and Schor close their eyes, their faces directed out towards the audience; there is a likeness in their movements, as though they could be sisters. One sits as the other walks around to sit again, then they lean against each other back to back. Their roles shift, the left is on the right and right on the left.

Hall begins the 16 positions again, repeating the well-rehearsed score. The bench, the softest color of rose, begins to smudge with grey footprints transferred from the surrounding concrete floor. Hall is on



top of the bench, arms out creating angles with the lines of their body, their face is down. Next Hall's arms are stretched out in one line, their body is bent at the knees, with their face down. I am attracted to this one position, the second to last. They lie flat on their back, body long, one arm bent slightly farther than a right angle. Hall's face is turned away from the audience, lying as if standing, arm out as if caught gesturing to someone far away, their hand gently holding the edge of the bench seat. Hall slides from under the bench and stands next to and facing it, then bends at the waist to lay the left cheek of their face down onto the seat, their arms folding behind their back. Again, the sequence is finished.

Millie Kapp and Chris Domenick approach the bench and walk around steadily in the same direction, circling the object several times. In addition to Hall these two are the other non-senior performers. Their movement is deliberate and quick. Domenick's eyes look ahead while Kapp's eyes remain on Domenick. They pivot towards the bench and sit down on adjacent surfaces. Kapp and Domenick stand up to repeat their previous action. They walk around once and sit in opposite directions. Again they rise from their seats and walk in loops around the bench, each time returning to one of three sitting positions, like a game of rock-paper-scissors. They repeat this sequence, occupying different quadrants on the surface of the bench as if it were the static face of a clock and their moving bodies its arms.

Now sitting on the same side, Kapp and Domenick are next to each other, crossing their legs in unison and Hall enters the space for the final time and begins their score, face down on the floor, their hands holding the narrow, front-facing plane of the shapes. Kapp and Domenick pause. For a moment the three occupy the bench together. Hall moves to their second position. Kapp and Domenick walk out from the center of the room. The front side of Hall's body touches the surface and exposes its shape. Their body meets each shape, space, and edge. Encircled by the audience, Hall's gestures move in servitude, submission, omission, rest.



MIT LIST VISUAL ARTS CENTER

Cambridge, Massachusetts

April 17–May 20, 2018

Performers: Mary Bok, Gordon Hall, Mike Peterson, Lou Desautels, Danny Harris

Part II

Introduction

Yuri Stone

Gordon Hall's exhibition at the MIT List Visual Arts Center included three benches in the gallery—a constructed, angular bench made of concrete panels; a sequence of concrete panels leaning against the wall that constituted a disassembled bench; and a wooden bench so that visitors could sit, rest, and observe. A fourth bench, sitting just outside the gallery—a permanent bench designed by Scott Burton for the atrium of the Wiesner Building, installed during construction of the building in 1985—maintained an important presence throughout the planning and presentation of the project at MIT.

The Number of Inches Between Them was on view in the Bakalar Gallery from April 17 to May 20, 2018. In addition to the benches on view, the exhibition also included a poster documenting the original bench as it sits today in Clinton, New Jersey, accompanied by a letter from Gordon to Dennis Croteau, the artist who designed and made the original bench. Gordon and a group of four New England-based performers, each in their 70s or 80s, held a performance which engaged the central sculpture on view on April 28th. The performers included Gordon, Mike Peterson, Lou Desautels, Danny Harris, and bridging the connection to the previous incarnation of the performance, Mary Bok, who had performed in Maine the previous summer, and was also included in the revised List Center performance. The performance was then followed by a conversation between Gordon and art historian David J. Getsy. David, having just seen the performance for the first time, spoke openly and eloquently in what felt like real-time reflection and processing.

Throughout Gordon and David's conversation, I found myself turning over and over again the performance I had just seen. It was slippery in my mind—what did the figures and objects and movements all mean in relation to one another and to the bigger conversation around time and loss and bodies? The performance was slow and meditative, measured in each action, deliberate and strong. The gallery was silent, only the sound of the performers' breathing and bodies pressed against clothing pressed against concrete. The squeak of feet on floor, the creaking of joints as one stands. Sitting and standing, repeated many times over, circling the bench at the center of the gallery. Cryptic at first, though slowly the audience came to know the actions and objects with the aid of repetition by the performers. The performance changed the sculptures that had been on view for two weeks and prompted me to rethink some of the layers of the exhibition Gordon and I had been working on for the better part of the past year. Is this bench a monument? Is it an homage? Is it a love letter?

I listened as Gordon and David continued, bringing us closer and closer to parsing out what this thing was that we all just shared in. Poetics, melancholy, Dennis Croteau, intimacy, restraint, slowness,

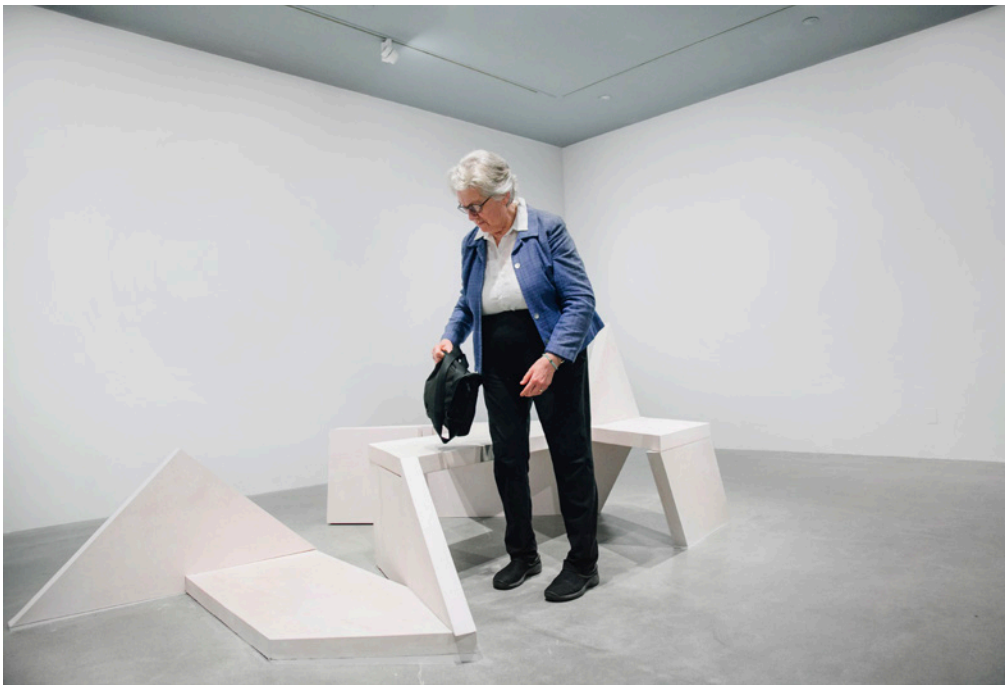


politics, repetition, Scott Burton, body language, history, grief, erotics, friendship, furniture, learning, presence, vulnerability. The bench is all of these things. It's a conversation, a slow and steady back and forth between artists, between moments in time, between generations, between bodies in proximity to one another—supporting each other.









Support Objects—
On Gordon Hall's
*The Number of Inches
Between Them*

Yuri Stone

As a sculptor, performer, and writer, Gordon Hall examines the relational, personal, and political effects of the ways we relate to objects and to each other. Using both abstract forms and carefully re-constructed copies of found objects, the artist asks how we might use such things and how they solicit bodily engagements from us. Ultimately, Hall's interests are in the social and political dynamics of these exchanges. The intentional, specific, and enigmatic objects created are both provocations to performance and allegories for an ethics of relationality. Both the sculptural objects and the performances that occur with and adjacent to them explore possibilities for an engagement with space, time, and objecthood that seeks to model alternative futures.

The Number of Inches Between Them, the exhibition on view at the List Center, continues a body of work in which Hall creates replicas of found, one-of-a-kind pieces of furniture. The replicas refer to objects Hall has encountered by chance and feels a magnetic attraction to, furniture that the artist wants to investigate physically through remaking. *The Number of Inches Between Them* doubles a geometric stone bench happened upon in a friend's grandparents' yard in 2016. Hall replicates the bench twice—once fully reconstituted to be identical to the original bench, and a second time disassembled into its component parts. All aspects of the object—its design, tactile quality, material, history, and the narrative of its maker—become implicated in the reanimation of the bench in a second life as sculpture. Here, Hall recovers the life of Dennis Croteau, a largely unknown artist who designed and fabricated the original bench shortly before passing away from complications relating to AIDS in 1989. A movement piece using the bench is performed by Hall and a group of Boston-based performers mid-way through the exhibition. The two sculptures in the exhibition are accompanied by a takeaway poster of an image of the original bench where it sits today, with an undeliverable letter from Hall to Croteau printed on its reverse.

The title of the work originates from a quote by late artist Scott Burton, whose own concrete benches are permanently installed just outside of the Bakalar Gallery. Burton was a sculptor, performance artist, and prolific writer who came to prominence in the 1980s, primarily recognized for making works that are both sculpture and furniture—his granite and bronze furniture pieces are now found in major public art collections around the world. Here at MIT, Burton designed the settee, bench, and balustrade in the atrium of the Wiesner Building, home to the List Visual Arts Center galleries. Burton's radical belief that formalism can and should be social, personal, and accessible underscored his life and work.¹ Like Croteau, Burton also passed away from AIDS-related complications in 1989.

1. David J. Gettsy, "Introduction: The Primacy of Sensibility," in *Scott Burton: Collected Writings on Art & Performance, 1965–1975*, ed. David J. Gettsy (Chicago: Soberscove Press, 2012), 1–32.



2. John Howell, "Acting/ Non-Acting: Scott Burton [interview]," *Performance Art Magazine* 2 (1979): 9.

Burton once said of the experience he desired for the seated audiences of his *Behavior Tableaux* works, "...what I want people to become aware of is the emotional nature of the number of inches between them."² This consideration of distance and proximity runs throughout Hall's exhibition: the precise number of inches between each panel of the assembled bench, the distance between the replica benches and the original bench, between the assembled bench and the disassembled bench, between the bench and the performers, and between subsequent generations of artists who were not able to interact during their lives.

All three of these artists—Burton, Croteau, and Hall—each extend a generosity, if not simply in the act of producing artworks that provide a chance for rest, but in framing how we engage with art and with one another. In creating a space of repose, *The Number of Inches Between Them* supports us in being present with those who no longer are. Hall produces a bench in this lineage, while considering vulnerability and care, the broader history and politics of support, and the structures that dictate the choreography of our bodies as we engage with the built world.

This text was initially included in the brochure for Gordon Hall's exhibition, The Number of Inches Between Them, at MIT List Visual Arts Center.



April 2, 2018

Dear Dennis,

I didn't come looking for you, I just loved your bench. I saw it in a photograph and asked my friend if I could come in person to her grandparents' yard to see it. Cracked and aging, your bench sat at the edge of the grass surrounded by fall leaves. As I walked up to it I knew right away that I needed to get to know it better. I measured every length and angle, trying to understand it from all sides, the ways the parts fit together to make the whole. It wasn't until afterward I learned that this beautiful and strange piece of outdoor furniture was made by an artist, that you had made it. I worked to piece together what I could of the events of your life and your death, trying to find out what I could from the people who are still alive to remember.

As you know, your bench is made of eight brownstone panels, two and a half inches thick, that fit together vertically and horizontally to make its legs, seat, and back. I decided to re-construct your bench, twice. I made two of each panel, casting them in concrete in my studio with white Portland cement and extra fine white sand. Some of the shapes make sense—a triangle, a square, a parallelogram—while others are irregular and unpredictable, nearly impossible to memorize with accuracy. Of my sixteen panels, I made eight of them the lightest pink, and assembled them together into a bench the way you did. The other eight panels I kept distinct and disassembled, leaning them on the walls in a row. The eight shapes range in weight from 45 pounds (the small triangle) to 320 pounds (the seat), and when trying to apprehend what these calculated numbers mean, I found myself comparing them to people—the anonymity and specificity of these numbers reminding me of the bodies of children and adults of various sizes—45 pounds, 75 pounds, 76 pounds, 90 pounds, 107 pounds, 209 pounds, 282 pounds, 320 pounds. Could I pick up the body of a person of this size? When I mix up the liquid concrete and pour it into the molds, it takes three days for the liquid to cure into a solid. I cover the just-poured panel with a blanket, and when I come back to my studio a day later the curing concrete is hot like a sleeping body, a puff of warm humid air released into my face when I fold back the blanket to check on it. Another day and a half later it is cold to the touch, rock hard and dead weight. It lets off a musty odor for another two weeks as it fully hardens.

I can't deadlift a 100-pound bag of sand or cement, but if I slide it one side at a time out of my car and onto a cart I can get it into the freight elevator and up to my studio on my own, just barely. I slice the bags open and scoop the materials out into the mixing bucket a pound at a time, mixing in the water and then decanting the hundreds of pounds of liquid concrete a 2-quart-bucket at a time into the lubed-up wood mold I've prepared. Once the concrete is solid, I need help with every aspect of making this work. I can lift only the smallest panel, the triangle, on my own; I have needed help getting all the others up and out of their molds, turning them over to sand the edges on the other sides, wrapping them, moving them, unwrapping them again. A friend of mine exclaimed to me while helping me lift one —“This is both very heavy and extremely fragile!” The bench cannot be assembled without a team of seven people, three of whom lay the 320-pound seat down onto the legs that the other three simultaneously shift into precisely the right locations to align the notches in its underside, allowing it all to snap together into a useable piece of furniture. These people not only need to be strong enough to lift the concrete panels, but also need to work together as a collective body to negotiate the task of assembling it. I've lost count of how many people helped me make this work. Many of them were paid for their help lifting and moving, while others offered their assistance freely—friends, my boyfriend, members of my family.

I'm told that you were small—taller than me though, and probably stronger, wiry. Who helped you with your bench? I wish I could ask you how you designed it, which shape you drew first and how you figured out how to fit them all together. The original paperwork is gone, and it is seeming like I will never know the exact year you made it, although it is not unlikely that it was 1983, the same year I was born, 34 years after you were, both in Massachusetts, just miles apart. If this was the year you made your bench, that would mean that you were the same age I am now, and that you had only six more years to live, although you would have no way of knowing that at the time. You didn't even have your diagnosis for another couple of years, and even then it was not understood what was happening. I can't tell if the square panel that is now leaning on the long vertical panel in the back is where you originally had it, or if it was somewhere else and broke off and was leaned there temporarily, and eventually permanently. I have reproduced the design as I found it. I wish I could ask you if I have it right.

When your bench was finished, did you look at it and feel how I feel? When the parts slid into each other and held each other up, did you think it was beautiful? Satisfying? The way it fits together, I feel it in my whole body. It reminds me of the time I went to the Noguchi Museum and felt overwhelmed by the sexuality of the interlocking stone pieces, confused at getting so aroused from looking at abstract sculpture. Wondering if other people feel this too. Did you sit down on your bench? Did you lie on it and let your arms and legs hang down off the sides? I have devised a dance in which I touch every surface of it with my body, draping myself over and around it in one pose after another while everybody watches.

Did you know that if you lean all the panels individually against the wall in a row they look like an as-yet-unknown alphabet? Like something to try to read, but you can't make out the letters. The way an A is a triangle, but getting more complicated from there. I wonder if you ever had them arranged that way, when they were waiting to be moved perhaps. 1,200 pounds of abstract characters, written to a distant future or past time.

(I've sometimes morbidly joked to friends that I became a sculptor in order to make my eventual death a maximum pain in the ass for everyone who cares about me. What to do with all these heavy objects?)

I'll be direct—there is very little left of you. There are a few images of your works, a couple of press clippings, one other outdoor sculpture, and the memories of your friends, who told me what they could about you as best they could. There were some questions I couldn't ask. They advised me not to try to find your sister. So many people didn't live through it, I can guess that many other people you knew also didn't make it, and I can't call them up to ask about you. What room did you spend your last days in? What furniture held your body? How did it feel to be so reliant?

I hope this letter reaches you. Your bench came to me just when I needed it, and I really hope you are all right with my re-constructions of it. I have loved getting to know it, and you, and the way all the parts fit together.

Yours truly, Gordon

Slow Bonds and the
Intimacy of Objects

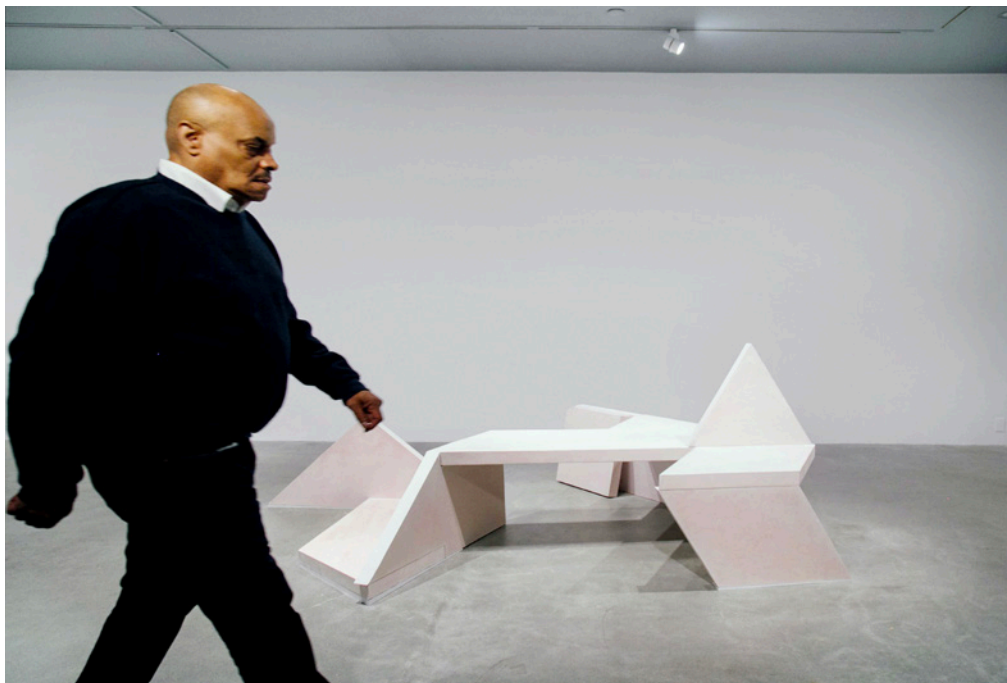
A Conversation
Between Gordon Hall
and David J. Getsy

Yuri Stone: I think a good way to start this conversation would be to ask Gordon to walk us through the different elements of the exhibition that is on view in the Bakalar Gallery.

Gordon Hall: *The Number of Inches Between Them* has four main components: two sculptures, a stack of posters, and the performance. As you may have gathered, the sculptures are two different forms of the same object. One of them is assembled into a finished bench, and the other one is comprised of the eight panels that make up the bench, separated, and leaning against the wall on the left side of the gallery. The posters that you see stacked on the shelf on the right side of the gallery show a photograph of the original bench that my sculptural replicas are based off of. They are exact to-scale copies of that bench you see in the image. On the other side of the poster is a letter, an undeliverable letter from me, to Dennis Croteau, the artist who made the bench, who passed away in 1989. The fourth component of the exhibition is the performance that you saw today, with five performers including myself.

David Getsy: As I've just seen the performance for the first time, this is not a full-fledged analysis, but I'm going to just go ahead and lead with an initial idea and then I'll unpack it. What compelled me most about the performance is how you offer—and this is going to sound grand—what we might call a “poetics of the interpersonal.” By that I mean that, throughout the performance, we slowly and carefully get to know this unique sculptural object in a way that mirrors your own process of research. In getting to know something in all its uniqueness through the actions of the performers, one learns to ask what are the relations it can offer us? What are the resistances it can offer us? Where does it accommodate us? All of this seems to be a way of thinking about not just a set of physical relations but also as a modeling of an ethics and a poetics of the interpersonal. That is my initial response to it, but I'd love to talk about the history of your encounter with Dennis Croteau's work. There was a lot of melancholy associated with the performance for me as well, because of that history. How did you get to know Croteau and the object?

GH: This piece started out as a continuation of my series of works that are replicas of found pieces of furniture. This series of replica sculptures is governed by rules: I have to encounter the object by accident, I can't go shopping or looking for it, it has to be hand-made and one of a kind, and I have to be unable to figure out who



made it. This project started out this way. My friend had a photo of the bench, and I asked her to bring me to see it in person in the yard of her grandparents' home in Clinton, New Jersey. Her grandfather explained that the bench was a sculpture which he had bought from the Boston-based dealer Joan Sonnabend in the 80s, but he couldn't recall the name of the person who made it. Over the next few months, with the help of various members of the family I learned that the bench was a sculpture made by a largely unknown artist named Dennis Croteau who worked during the 70s and 80s. I got into researching him and learning everything I could about him, speaking with some of his friends. I learned a lot but there were other things I couldn't find out, like what the bench is called and when exactly he made it, and how. I found out that Dennis passed away from complications related to AIDS in '89.

DG: Your earlier replica series—just for the audience who might not know—are much simpler objects.

GH: And smaller.

DG: And smaller. They share certain traits but not at this scale. It's interesting to hear how your research process necessarily had to expand in order to try and fill in what you could about the person who made the bench. But again, I feel like that process is also built into the structure of the performance, with its actions repeated again and again. You walk us through as viewers, helping us to get to know this bench. For example, there's the moment when you're saying "1:00, 2:00, 3:00..." giving us the position on the edge as one would with a clock. I started thinking "OK, the positions should all be equally spaced," and then I began to see that your body was placed in different positions and spacings necessitated by the bench's angles. It's a way of teaching us to get to know this thing. If I asked those of us in the audience to describe the bench now, as opposed to at the beginning of the performance, we could do it a lot better because we've been staring at it and watching the ways that bodies relate to those angles. I love the slowness of that *getting to know*. It's mysterious, opaque, odd, particular, all of those things, but it's also... We have an intimacy that has been established through the performance. But I want to step back from the performance to talk about how this works when the performance is not happening—for viewers looking at the sculpture who have not seen the performance. I think this dynamic is still there. Could you talk a little bit more about how you see the installation when it's not being activated?



GH: I primarily make sculptures, and about half of them have performances that originate in them and happen with them/on them/around them. I feel stubborn about not putting documentation of performances in the exhibition with the sculptures. I have a variety of reasons for this, but part of that is what you are pointing to, which is that I set out to make the objects themselves do much of the work of the exhibition. The performances can elaborate, deepen, refocus; but my hope is that a lot of it is already there in the sculptures. Perhaps if I go to the beginning and ask myself, “what is behind this desire to replicate a piece of furniture?” The answer is that, for me, making a copy of something is the best way to get to know it. Because you have to get close enough to it to understand how it fits together. For me there’s no other way. I think the closest parallel would be, for people who draw, drawing a portrait of something or someone. You actually look at the thing, possibly for the first time (although I don’t draw so I don’t know a lot about this). And so in this exhibition I have tried to reproduce that process, in having the two different versions of it where you can see how it comes apart and fits together. When you look at the assembled version you can put together, sort of, which pieces are which and so you start flipping them around in your mind, right? Upside down, and horizontally, and vertically. I’m trying to push the viewer to do some perceptual work that involves becoming more acquainted with, intimate with, knowledgeable about this object in a way that mirrors and condenses how I did.

DG: What I love about your work is that it so quietly distills this process down for viewers, but it also demands time. For example, there are those odd shapes that are all along the wall—unorthodox shapes that we are not used to seeing. They appear arbitrary if it were not for the meaning that has been given to them by Croteau and you. And so, we slowly unpack their particularities and their relations, and they start to increase in recognition and particularity as we see that one is a support, the other is supported, here is where they lock, and so on. All of that is kept on a formal level but it’s a way to distill the slow way we actually get to know something—and how the thing gains meaning through its repetition. But, all of this greater knowledge of the sculpture comes also through the use, its parts, its repetitions, and everything working together. This does take some time. It’s not a quick exhibition to go through, right? I had to start to compare and contrast and look deeply in order to situate myself—both alone in the installation and also when I was viewing the performance. The things that I thought were merely



odd at first and confusing or perhaps a little mute began to speak, slowly. I started seeing how they relate to each other and everything else in the room. Even when just considering the installation alone, we must go through a process of finding particularity through recognizing repetition and its variations. That back and forth between different ways of trying to understand the same object is crucial not just to the performance but also to the installation—especially with the gesture to a space and time outside of the gallery through the back and forth between the image on the poster and your sculpture. We start to compare and contrast, seeing a glimpse of the life of this form in other places.

GH: Can I interject something?

DG: Sure!

GH: I was just reflecting on this in relation to the performance that just took place. This work, in particular, is probably the most pared back thing I've made. There are just a few elements in the show, the formal language is quite reduced, the performance moves along slowly, and there is a lot of repetition in the objects and the movement. I'm not sure how it comes across to the viewer, but for me it's an ongoing battle to try to resist my temptation to give more to look at, to make it more entertaining. I'm not interested in boredom, exactly, but I am interested in providing a pace which feels really different from the pace of the surrounding world, especially right now. So much stuff is constantly happening, a million things at once, visually and in every other sense. For me making work and seeing work has become a way of retraining my own perception so that I can move more slowly, or look more closely at things. This show, I think it does ask a lot of the viewer; the silence of the performance, the repetition, and concrete sculptures. Perhaps to the viewer this reduction could seem like a forgone conclusion, but for me it's a constant process of remaining committed to it, despite often feeling some type of pressure to give more.

DG: That reticence, that slowness that you impose on the viewing situation is part of the politics of the work. It demands from the viewer commitment, to get to know, to understand what one can understand from looking and thinking and spending time. For me that's one of the lessons of your work more broadly—to think about how a commitment to viewing the work is rewarded by the objects that at first seem opaque or that have their back turned to you. This is

what I was talking about when I used this grand phrase “the poetics of the interpersonal.” It’s like friendship or love—the longer one spends getting to know the object of that love, attention transforms towards intimacy. And this getting-to-know takes time, and I feel like that’s the deliberate slowness you produce in the work. You refuse to be simply pedagogical with the work or to fully illustrate your research practice. Many other artists use an array of tactics to quickly reveal everything so that it can catch fleeting and distracted attention and be immediately categorized (and consumed). Your work, however, seems to me to be quite intentionally moving away from that. You are creating this ethical situation with formal objects as a way of teaching us how the ways we look at unfamiliar art objects can model the ways we relate as persons to each other. Maybe we can talk about the title of the work?

GH: The title comes from a quote from the artist Scott Burton. Would you be so kind as to give a short summary of who Scott Burton was for people who are not familiar with his work?

DG: Gladly. Scott Burton could be described as polyglot in the art world. He started as an art critic and wrote some very important art criticism, and then for 10 years was a performance artist who, in this time, also started to make sculptures of furniture that functioned as furniture. In the late 70’s and early 80’s he pivoted to public art, motivated by his belief in trying to make an anti-elitist, open, and accessible form of artistic practice. The atrium of the Wiesner Center has at its center the benches and the balustrade that Scott Burton designed for it. It’s a sculpture that we’ve all been sitting on and walking through. The works are intentionally

camouflaged, invisible, hard to see, but they are based on Burton’s own long-running investigation into behavioral psychology, the cybernetic study of body language, the dynamics of how to use space in different ways. All of this, again, is a kind of slow research practice that ends up in these fairly simple, reductive, geometric forms that are meant to provide spaces for you to relate, to linger, to engage. He’s another artist whose move into functional sculpture came from a real investigation of performance practices, but also the everyday performances that we do when we relate to each other nonverbally. The other thing that’s important about Burton’s work is that he was a critic of minimalism and also one of the primary post-minimal artists. He was working along the same lines as the female postminimalists who explored the formal reduction of minimalism not as a way to create universals but, rather, to make space for difference. Minimalism’s idea is that you take something and reduce it to its simplest forms intentionally in order to bore you into paying attention to the way you’re relating to the space and the object. So that’s the cliché of what a minimalist cube is supposed to do. But artists such as Scott Burton, Eva Hesse, Lynda Benglis, Jackie Winsor are part of an alternate history of trying to take that shift from the artist to the viewer and introduce into it the possibility of the personal, of difference, and even of resistance. But the story of this work has been downplayed or sidelined in the kind of heroic art histories of minimalism into post-minimalism into contemporary art. In Burton’s case, part of that is because of the AIDS crisis. That connects up with the themes of your work for the List. More generally, this alternate history of one tendency within postminimalism reminds us of the ways in which the idea of formal reduction had all of this potential that was explored by



artists who were interested in questions of difference. With the distance of history those politics are harder to see immediately, however, I know.

GH: I'll just indulge a little bit and say Burton's work, there's a sexuality to it. There are various coded, sexual ways of relating via objects and interpersonal relationships. You introduced me to Burton's work and your research on him has been so valuable for me in understanding these layers. For me, as an art student during the late 90s through the 2000s, the version of minimal and post minimal work that included Scott Burton was largely written out of what we were taught. I got the impression that as young artists, if we were interested in identity we should be interested in *those* kinds of artists, and if we're interested in formalism we'd be interested in *these* kinds of artists. And of course all of this is based on the presumption that the political and the formal are clearly identifiable and discrete categories. Ultimately for me this version of art history didn't compute. Scott Burton has been very important for me, not just because I'm really excited about the work itself, but also because I am interested in why certain artists are remembered and historicized and other ones not. How are these stories told? Who got to be the authority on this particular canon? Why then as a young queer student of art did I feel like the work I was interested in was not the work I was supposed to be interested in? That's why I was excited to learn about this alternate history and Burton's way of making. At any rate, the title—I had to go all the way around... Burton had a series of three performance works in the 70s called the *Behavior Tableaux* performances. In these performances, groups or individual performers were moving in slow

motion and silence, sometimes naked, sometimes clothed, often wearing platform shoes, in relation to furniture. And then the audience was made to sit 80 feet away from the performance, so not only was this thing extremely silent and slow and long, it was really far, quite far away. And all the chairs, a little bit like today, all the chairs are put *ttt, ttt, ttt, ttt, ttt* [gestures to describe close proximity of chairs] so you're basically touching the person next to you in the audience. So there is all of this potentially awkward, or maybe not, you know, whatever that is, accidental touching. And in an interview Burton was asked what his intention was in organizing the audience for these performances in this way. His answer was that "in the *Behavior Tableaux* what I want people to become aware of is the emotional nature of the number of inches between them." He was talking about *these* inches. [Gestures at shoulder] So for me that little phrase, "the number of inches between them," popped off the page as a way of talking about the both physical and symbolic space between people, but also in the work itself; all of the measurements of bench, the way the pieces of it fit together, the way it relates to the other objects that are lined up against the wall, and the distance between them as well. And so it just turned into a way of talking about this question of distance between various things, both literally and in a more expanded sense. Further, the fact the Scott Burton and Dennis Croteau both died from AIDS in the same year, 1989, helped me feel that there was some connection between them, perhaps a mysterious, or eerie, one. I did learn that Burton and Croteau were acquaintances, but I haven't been able to find out more. I had already been thinking of, I mean I've been working with furniture, different kinds of platforms, and things that hold up people's bodies, but this bench had taken on extra significance



for me in terms of thinking about bodily vulnerability, the kinds of dependencies we have on each other, what support means, both physical support and symbolic or metaphorical, or infrastructural or emotional support. And so the AIDS crisis announced itself as part of this project in a way that resonated with what I was already thinking about while beginning to make it.

DG: The *Behavior Tableaux* performances were based on Burton's interest in behavioral psychology and body language but also in his experience of street cruising and of silent signals of desire. Cruising signals are conveyed by people who are also looking for them from others underneath the veil of normal movements and gestures on the street. Burton was trying to produce an analogy between the performers' movements and the either awkward or exciting relations that are established amongst the audience members at the same time. So, these dynamics go back and forth. I think one of the things that's useful about Burton as a kind of analogy is that he also drew from an experience of sexuality and queer culture to make work that sometimes figured these themes. But he also was trying to think about how this relationship to the normative—to the rules that we're told about how we're supposed to be—actually allowed one to think about a larger politics or ethics of relations among people. It starts with questions of sexuality and moves to questions of sociality, and that dynamic is played out in part because the private—the so-called private realm of sexuality—is always highly legislated. He realized that just by thinking about the power dynamics of that situation he could think more expansively. One of the things, just to pivot back to your performance, that I find so interesting is, for me, the context of Dennis Croteau dying in 1989 of AIDS

seemed to me to have kicked the performance into a certain set of emotional questions, at least for a viewer like me, in which the life of the bench was being thematized by the different relations that happen through the performances. With the first performer, we are looking at someone basically looking at us, but they are also feeling their inside, thinking about their own body. Suddenly we move to the kind of rapid succession of the other two performers who are seated with their backs toward us. It would be so easy to stop with that and have us have the same kind of identification, to look over the shoulders of those performers and think "oh this is that pastoral moment" where someone is looking into the distance. But you didn't give us that. No, it was just the repetition of these movements, and I suddenly thought, in the middle of this, that this was a way of thinking about all of the different relations in this bench's life. The movement around and the repetition started to get a different rhythm to it, and then when the time signatures are put in: "1:00, 2:00..." the passage of time, and the bodies came back in relation to the bench, and the ones who left. All of that playing out in my experience of the performance. When we think about the erotics of this work, it's not a simple figuration of the erotic, but rather the build-up through a body over its many different stages in relationship to the other bodies that come in contact with it. And so, it has this beautiful way of containing these moments that spoke to intimacy and eroticism, but always using that to push toward this larger question of getting to know this object's particularities. It also staged the ways in which this bench produced its intimacies and relations through its odd angles and forms. Relatedly, and you didn't know this since this is a really obscure Scott Burton thing I'm going to tell you: the Wiesner Center benches were Burton's attempt to



be pedagogical. When you go outside you'll see this lower curved bench and behind it is this settee with a back and behind that is the balustrade which blocks off the stairs, the railing. It was his way of showing how one form and function could become another. There is a side story of the building codes he had to navigate so there are some things that don't look exactly as he wanted to... but the idea was that that bench and that settee are both the same form and different. It's illustrating a transformation, and he said this is like a dialectic—it's one plus two equals this third term that has both of those things in it. So that's what's going on outside in the atrium. But it's the same kind of syntax that you offer with the work in the gallery in which these forms gain their meaning through their relations and repetitions with each other and then begin to transform with their uses. I love that by having this formal reduction and structural unpacking of this object, you prompt us to get to know these forms by showing us what they do in relation to each other. There are all of these connections on the themes of transformation and use that connect with the Burton works that are right outside of the door. So I love that. Sorry to geek out on this.

GH: I'm just realizing, reflecting on what just happened and hearing you talk about it, that perhaps there are two main affects in the performance. I'm not sure I set out for them to be there, but I see them now. One of them is grief and grieving. And I guess I separate them that way because thinking of the performance—the moment when they're doing this round of sitting and one of the performers finishes before the other one, there's perhaps a lot of grief in that—leaving and having to finish something by yourself. But then also I have thought about the performance, but also the exhibition



overall, as a space of grieving provided for the viewers, whatever grieving there is to do, as a quiet space. The way this gallery doesn't have any windows and is always exactly the same, and the wooden bench by the door that we made for the exhibition so there is a place for the viewers to sit and look and read the letter, and it is the same height as the concrete bench. So both grief and grieving. Then there is an erotics, or a sexuality, playing out between the performers, the way we move together and watch each other move, and in the way the audience is asked to watch our bodies. But also, and perhaps more importantly to me, there is an erotics of relating to an inanimate object. I was thinking about all of the intimacies one has with furniture in one's life, and especially in illness or as we age, this intimacy gets amplified as we become more and more reliant on the objects of our lives in order to be sustained. So in this work there is grief and there is sexuality, and I am thinking of them as very intertwined in this work. Perhaps the pin that holds them together is something about objectification. When does a body go from being a subject to being an object? What are the different ways that bodies can be objects in some very damaging ways and some very reparative or pleasurable ways? What is it to be looked at by other people, to have your body looked at? How is it different for different people to have our bodies looked at?

DG: These strands do come together, because when you think about a life... it's all about the series of intimacies and relations that make it up. This is a way of thinking about something like love: it's always painful because it will always end. Because two people together cannot always be together. And the two—erotics and grief—are closely related, and I think that gets played out in these moments in your



performance when the performers get out of synch with each other. The movement of the performance enacts moments of support, intimacy, and also being past and getting out of synch. This happens with the performers both physically with the object and interpersonally with each other. This leads me to a question: would you talk a little bit about your decision to cast your performers as older people?

GH: Yes. There are a number of reasons—the main one being that I wanted to have the bodies in the performance be bodies that are already in a relation of reliance on various kinds of support and assistance. There is a vulnerability to aging that feels like a crucial ingredient here. But also, personally, it has been a way to just get to know, even a little bit, people who are in different parts of their life than I am. It has really been special. And it has helped me think about what is to come, what happens in a long life, and about parts of life many people didn't and don't get to experience. So it's about the performance but then it's also about the relationships that go into making it.

DG: One of the impacts of the AIDS crisis, for everybody, is that it made certain kinds of intergenerational contact and friendships very difficult. When a huge segment of the population is suddenly removed from it, that affects everybody individually and the culture more broadly. There's a lot of work that is being done to reestablish these kinds of intergenerational friendships. And it does take work but that's also part of the research that went into your piece, too. After all, this bench is such an opaque object because of the AIDS crisis. People and memories have been lost. And that's part of our duty to repair those gaps. But I hope that we can end it on a happier note with some audience questions,



especially since the performers have joined us in the audience. Does anyone have any questions for Gordon?

Audience: Earlier you said something about three categories in the replica sculptures. Why those three things?

GH: I think the first time it happened, it happened by accident. And then I noticed that there were guidelines actually built into what I did, so thought I'd try to do it again. More generally speaking, perhaps if I make the criteria for my decision making very narrow I can be creative within them.

Audience: But why not polka dots? Why those three things? You know what I mean, why those three things exactly?

GH: Why furniture? Why handmade? And why anonymous?

DG: I can see from your pause you've got too many answers to each of these questions. If you'll allow me, I can offer an answer based on my external perspective on your work and our previous conversations.

GH: Go ahead.

DG: Well, furniture because... furniture is a really powerful form; it's anthropomorphic. It's made to be in relationship to our bodies. Chairs have arms, legs, back, feet—all of these things. And so furniture is always a way to conjure a body, and it is empty without us. Furniture always evokes the bodily relation. So, it seems to me that for an artist who's thinking about questions of the interpersonal, and



the social, and the bodily—and how we think about the particularity of bodies—furniture does seem like a natural choice. The particular or odd object is also about these same kinds of thematics. When you encounter something that seems to be like nothing else in the world, the only way you can understand it is by taking bits of other things and saying “this looks kind of like that, this looks kind of like that,” and trying to make sense of it. But the more time you spend with something the more you force yourself to get to know it for itself, rather than for the category that it’s in.

GH: Yes! Getting to know a specific object instead of a category of objects. Perhaps the recreating of these objects is a way of caring about them... the world’s filled with objects we don’t pay attention to and this is a way of providing some care for them.

DG: And the handmade... I think just like because of the intimacy in that—being able to see something as an intentional object, one where you can see the ways the person who made it put it together... to accommodate for the messiness of the material, which gives it its own history.

GH: Hearing you say that makes me realize that maybe the answer is that all three of these things are ways that bodies are present even when they are not present. Every piece of furniture conjures a ghost, the presence of a body that uses it.

Audience: Earlier you were talking about the way in which minimal form, at a moment in high modernism, was essentially kind of didactic. The way in which it was really set on asking the viewer



to consider themselves in relation to this very minimal thing. And then as you’ve been talking that seems to be returning, in my mind, especially in relationship to the didactic nature of asking us to remember specific people during a specific time, making specific objects for specific purposes. It feels as much like you’re teaching yourself these things as you are eventually maybe teaching an audience? And those are definitely not the same thing. Like I see auto-didacticism as sort of an auto-erotics in you putting this show together. I’m wondering if you can speak to the difference in those two things. In the difference between the experience of teaching yourself maybe as a person from a particular generation and the experience of, maybe, imagining an audience and imagining maybe that you have something that you can teach them.

GH: That’s a really good question. It makes me want to start by saying that, perhaps, I think of being an artist as a way of learning things. Including learning how to do things with my body that I didn’t know. Like how to make stuff out of concrete. But also in the processes of self-transformation that are part of realizing each project. I have an uneasy feeling about trying to teach viewers. Why do I have this feeling? I think I’m more interested in providing a space that has some possibilities in it. Some of which are more logical and open up easily and others of which are harder to find. That feels like all I can do.

Audience: I was struck by the many systems that announce themselves as ready-made invitations to intuit the entire system. Like the clock starts and we know where it’s going. You do one pass through your choreography, and when it comes back we know what’s going to



happen. The shapes are like tangrams that we can fit together in our minds and reorganize them. So it does feel like an invitation to teach ourselves, not just an invitation to be told what to pay attention to.

DG: I agree, that's very much part of it. Because then the second time you do that series of movements without saying "1:00, 2:00, 3:00" we've learned what it means, which is the same way that we learn what those odd polyhedrons start to mean the longer we look at them. Maybe the word that is kind of hanging us up on this is the idea of the didactic. I always think that for me, the best recent art models a relationship with the world. The viewer engages with that modeling, and can choose to take it on themselves and to learn from it or to reject it, but it's different from teaching it, in a one-directional didactic way. It's actually about how Gordon's performance itself goes through this process of getting to know the Croteau object as a way of modeling for us what that might look like with something or someone else.

Audience: I want to agree with that. As a gallery attendant in the gallery talking about this process with some people who come in who have a variety of interactions with the work. Once they learn the story of the work, and see and feel the appreciation and fascination that you have with the original sculpture enough to make two whole sets of sculptures of it. Often I try to point out the pieces outside in the atrium that are also sculptures that they may have walked by or sat on, and didn't realize were sculptures. I have the hope that they are able to mirror that process with whatever objects, furniture, they have in their lives. Especially knowing that the piece is found in an authentic way and whatever they happen upon they might mirror that process.



YS: I want to bring up something that didn't come up in the conversation that I really love. David you mention this idea of friendship and this sort of interconnectedness and I thought, Gordon, maybe you could talk about how this piece is sort of unique for you in terms of the other objects that you've made, and not only the weight of this work, physically, but also sort of the means in which its erected.

GH: There's a bunch of things that make this unique. Primarily, this is the first work that I've ever made that explores the work of a particular other artist, and that's because of how it happened, and it might never happen again. So there is an interpersonal part to this that is different from other works of mine. And then, these sculptures are obviously very heavy and hard to move around. I kept chuckling because I always had this kind of assumption that "making heavy sculpture is really macho," but also it is really vulnerable, because I can't do things by myself. I'll be in my studio, and I can't lift any of the panels except for the little triangular one. Once they go into the molds and cure into a solid, I can't do anything with them by myself. I have to get someone to come and help me get it out of the mold, and help me flip it over, help to wrap it, help to put it in the truck, and then to put the bench together takes seven people. Some of these people in this room now have been through this with me. The seat has to go down onto the legs, and it weighs 320 pounds, and everything has to be in the exact right location for the notches to line up to hold it together. For me I really found this whole experience to be one of vulnerability, of finding myself in a position that felt powerless in relationship to the weight of this work and having to ask for so much help from people. I found this vulnerability to be



really difficult. I'm the kind of person who likes to do things by myself and not feel reliant on others. But the process of making this work ended up teaching me some of the stuff that the work was about, weirdly. Because I found myself in the position of needing support and needing help even to just do basic stuff like putting one part of it into my car. It was very moving for me, when the rage and powerlessness I felt gave way to feeling like I was embodying the logic of the work in my own emotions as I went through making it and showing it. It taught me about bodily vulnerability and the necessity of relying on the care of others.

YS: I suppose I ask for you to bring it up because as the curator, maybe a little behind the curtain; we had seven preparators to help construct this bench and one of our preparators didn't make it that day, called out, so I stepped in to help. For months prior I had been thinking about, and writing about, and talking to Gordon about these systems of support, and ideas about vulnerability, and all of these ideas felt somewhat abstract, or distant, but it wasn't until I was holding the top of the thing, shoulder to shoulder with John the other preparator, and there's Ariana, and our registrar and other members of staff holding different pieces all together...

GH: ...and everyone started bickering!

YS: We were sort of running around and checking because it also had to be level. I had to laugh because I'm standing there holding this incredibly heavy concrete slab and it felt like such a natural execution of these ideas that we had been talking about for so long.

GH: It's making me realize that it's such an embodiment of the role of the curator. In doing this show together you have been in the role of holding my work but also my thoughts and feelings and the life that I put into making it. And that holding became literal. And very heavy!

YS: What I love about this exhibition is that there are so many layers that slowly reveal themselves—I continued to discover new aspects—as they slowly revealed themselves over the course of the work being on view and now the performance has added yet more to consider.



Elizabeth Atterbury is an artist based in Portland, Maine. Elizabeth has had solo exhibitions at Mrs. in Queens, Document in Chicago, and at The Colby College Museum of Art in Waterville, Maine. She has been in group exhibitions at the Portland Museum of Art in Portland, Maine; Kate Werble Gallery and Bodega, both in New York; and at Et al. Etc in San Francisco, among others.

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Yuri Stone is a curator and writer based in Boston, Massachusetts. He is the Assistant Curator at the MIT List Visual Arts Center where he has most recently organized solo exhibitions by Heimo Zobernig (2017) and Allison Katz (2018). His writing is included in the forthcoming first monograph on Allison Katz's work, published by JRP-Ringier, and his criticism has been published by Flash Art, Art Review, and others.

Pages 6–7: photo by Gordon Hall.

Pages 14–16, 22, 32–40, and 40: photos by Sara Salamone.

Page 20: photo by Alexis Iammarino.

Pages 24–28 and 40: photo by Stephen Lichty.

Pages 50–56: photos by Peter Harris.

Pages 58–92: photos by Cassandra J. Rodriguez, Stealth Visuals.



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Published on the occasion of:

The Number of Inches Between Them
2017

Pigmented cast concrete, one-sided
color poster multiple, performance
42 min.

Performers: Mary Bok, Gordon
Hall, Alan Crichton, Del Hickey,
Susan Schor, Millie Kapp,
and Chris Domenick

Steel House Projects/
Winter Street Warehouse,
Rockland, Maine
August 4–26,
performance August 11, 2017

The Number of Inches Between Them
2017–2018

Pigmented cast concrete, two-sided
color poster multiple, performance
39 min.

Performers: Mary Bok, Gordon Hall,
Mike Peterson, Danny Harris,
and Lou Desautels

MIT List Visual Arts Center,
Cambridge, Massachusetts
April 17–May 20,
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