



Gordon Hall
WHAT HELD YOUR BODY?
Billboard, West Seneca, NY
14 x 48 feet
2020

For my contribution to For Freedom's billboard campaign of questions posed in advance of the 2020 presidential election, I wanted to ask a question that does not immediately seem political, but that asks us to think about bodily vulnerability and all the different kinds of infrastructures that do and don't support us in various ways. Stemming from my work as a sculptor making abstract furniture-like objects, I am of course thinking about bodily support in the physical sense of what holds us up—chairs, benches, and platforms, but also cars, hospital beds, and all the various kinds of assistive technologies we rely on like wheelchairs, ramps, and lifts – the means by which our bodies are physically held by objects in ways that enable life. Simultaneously, I am invoking support in a more interpersonal sense – the care-giving of parenting, assisting one another in disability, and holding one another – literally in embrace. There are, of course, politics to all of these things, but I also mean to pose the question in a more explicitly political sense—in terms of the stakes of having and not having access to the health care we all need to literally “hold” our bodies, and the meaning of treating this kind of care as a privilege rather than a basic necessity. I wanted to ask people to feel in a visceral way our need for support and care, the fundamental vulnerability of human life, despite misogynic and ableist fantasies of autonomy and self-reliance. Simultaneously, however, I am also thinking about the opposite meaning of the word “hold,” not in terms of support but in terms of constraint—being held down, or held in, by one another, by police, by prison, and also the more psychic forms of constraint that curtail what we can envision being and doing with our bodies, expectations on our bodies that can be equally damaging as being physically immobilized. My hope is that as people pass the billboard day after day, these layered meanings of the question will unfold themselves in the daydreamy way we think while driving and walking. I hand-drew the billboard in colored pencil to both set it apart in the world of printed letterforms and also in the hopes that this time-consuming process would request a kind of slowness and care in considering the possible answers.