

Cameron Clayborn

Kevin Hernández Rosa

Diana Sofia Lozano

Amina Ross

Audrey Ryan

Leeches hold a picture of our abundance. A leech can live for a year off a single bite; and, except for a little bleeding, we would not be any wiser or worse for the wear. By siphoning off a moment of our body's circular operations, a leech externalizes the growth these patterns feed. This exhibition extracts transfusions out of ongoing processes, the faith that in this moment of culmination nothing ever really ends. Here the surprise and discomfort of an unstable relationship to the environment breeds hybrid forms, grown out of our strange reality into even more uncharted space.

The shared lifeblood of the title turns me to the necessity of fluidity. We have to be a little shapeless to be of use to each other. These amorphous, undefined borders offer a vision, a sense of the growth we do but are so often forbidden from inhabiting. In a world that demands self-assuredness and independence, these pieces boast a riverish tendency away from containment toward a wider horizon of collective becoming. Keep an eye out for moments that leak, drip, smear, ripple, and tear across their content. From vessels that carry sugar water in Audrey Ryan's Stamped Upon, to the fragrant emulsions in Diana Sofia Lozano's installation, to the blue lines that excrete from Cameron Clayborn's brown cushioncontainercapsules, these works powerfully embody the ability to resist stasis, to build a release for ongoing becoming out of a calcified moment. In this liquefied sense of time we can feel motion's discreet disruptions of form, its shape shifting around skin as the visual slips into the haptic.

By turns generous and reticent, the works on display drift beyond their materiality, punctured by their relationships to the artists. Amina Ross shared the labor of quilting with their grandmother, and Kevin Hernández Rosa gathered splinters from the remnants of a speaker jointly destroyed in a moment of synergistic catharsis. The materials have strayed and determined their own trajectories in unique ways. These entanglements and their reincarnations condition the vibrancy encountered in the work.¹ To acknowledge endlessness is to resist resolution, even if what remains unsolved is ourselves. If "the struggle for a culture of critique and possibility is now inseparable from the economic struggle to retrieve real abundance from the illusion of scarcity," then *it clings like a leech* finds real abundance in refusing hierarchization and completion in the world of objects and their assumed boundaries.²

To embody the ethos of *it clings like a leech*, the online exhibition features an ongoing exchange between artists and writers. It coalesces texts that slip and spill into each of the accompanying thesis works to engender additional sites for observation, engagement, reflection, and play. Conjured during confined times, *it clings like a leech* offers an experiment in alternative world-making — one that is cooperative, self-organized, and extra-institutional. Rather than enclosing the work in description, these intertextual dialogues invite participants to collaborate with their intimate, porous, and sticky interlocutors.

How will they latch onto us? Where do we carry what clings beyond the moment of contact, the residue of the exchange?

— Tobi Kassim & Jacinda Tran

1 Jane Bennett works to "enhance receptivity to the impersonal life that surrounds and infuses us" and "generate a more subtle awareness of the complicated web of dissonant connections between bodies."

2 David Lloyd, "The Goal of the Revolution is the Elimination of Anxiety" in *Critical Ethnic Studies*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016) 212.

it clings



like a leech

FIRST ROOM

Audrey Ryan

Stamped upon, 2021

- 01 Two licks, foam, plastic, plexiglass, aluminum, trace mineral salt, 36 × 84 × 6"
- 02 JustiFLY inserts, Black Kow® manure, flies, glass dishes, simple syrup, plexiglass, chemical plug, LED lights, text formed with Tobi Kassim, dimensions variable

SECOND ROOM

Kevin Hernández Rosa

41.786880,-72.678070, either chicken bones or glazed dandelions popping around the knees, 2021

- 03 (desublimated. effigy/monument), 2021, Sunn 410 SR speaker cabinet, packing tape, couch, dimensions variable
- 04 MASS CATCHER, 2021, broomstick, Utz cheese balls, epoxy, 42 × 69 × 66"
- 05 Flag, 2021, sea debris, galvanized corrugated steel tube, steel, 62 × 8 × 8"
- 06 hovering hold, 2021, street sign, signposts, steel bracket, hardware, 42 × 96 × 22"
- 07 Untitled (Pin Wheel), 2021, Utz cheese balls, epoxy, paper-mâché, steel mesh, steel, automatic air fresheners, found earring, found sticker, found dollar, 12 × 27 × 32"
- 08 Untitled (Drano), 2021, Utz cheese balls, epoxy, steel, Drano, black lunch bag, 11 × 39 × 55"

MEZZANINE

Diana Sofia Lozano

- 09 My Body is Covered in Galls, Each One a Measure of the Many Ways I Will Behave Without Moral Principles, 2021, color pencil on inkjet print, mirrored acrylic, 42 × 29.5" (diptych)
- 10 The Sweetness of the Hold, Otherwise Unseen, 2021, steel, wire, dyed wool felt, pigmented resin clay, epoxy resin, sewing pins, silicone, "Bermuda Triangle" fragrance oil, "Garden Dirt" fragrance oil, dark corn syrup, craft sand, cast aluminum, mirrored acrylic, dimensions variable

BASEMENT

Cameron Clayborn

- 11 Made From Scratch (mural 1), 2021,

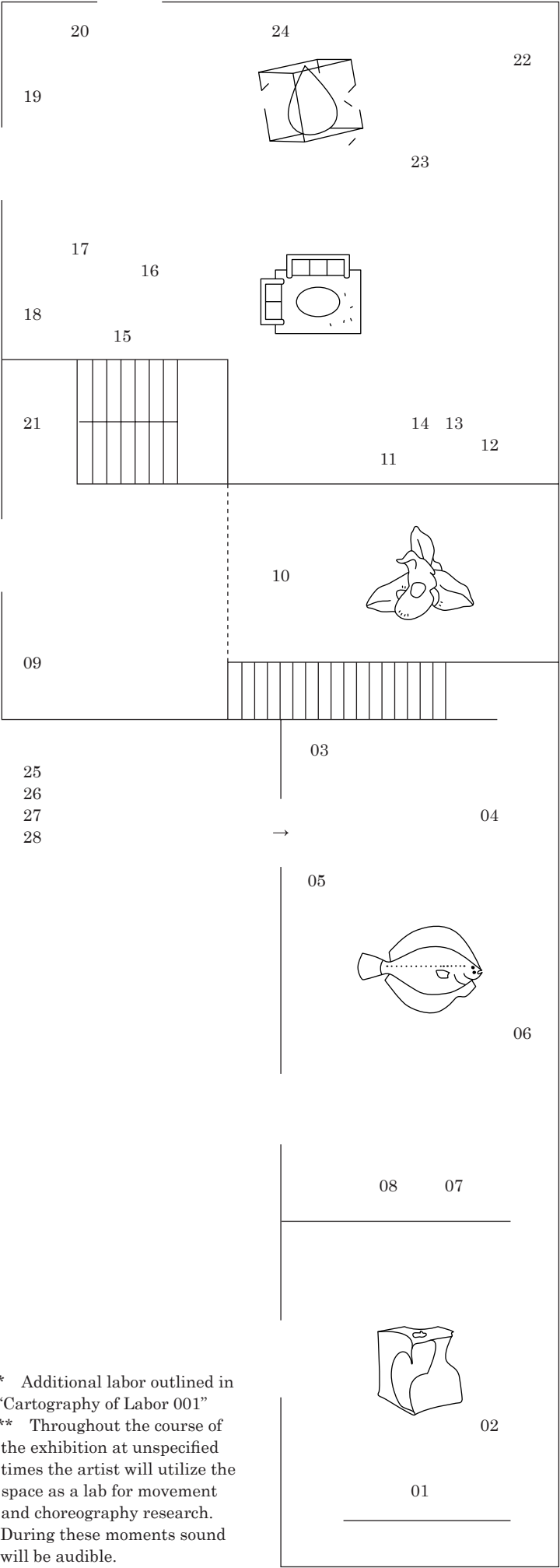
- colored pencil, latex paint, oil pastel, 102 × 208"
- 12 capsule, 2021, fiber fill, vinyl, velcro, 7 × 5.5 × 7"
- 13 cushioncapsule, 2021, fiber fill, vinyl, velcro, 12 × 13.5 × 12"
- 14 capsule, 2021, fiber fill, vinyl, velcro, 1.25 × 1.25 × 1.25"
- 15 Made From Scratch (mural 2), 2021, colored pencil, latex paint, oil pastel, 114 × 600"
- 16 cushioncontainercapsule, 2021, denim, fiber fill, sand, vinyl, velcro & zipper, 9 × 10.5 × 35.5"
- 17 cushioncontainercapsule, 2021, denim, fiber fill, sand, vinyl, velcro & zipper, 5 × 9 × 38.5"
- 18 cushioncontainercapsule, 2021, denim, fiber fill, sand, vinyl, velcro & zipper, 9.5 × 20 × 41"
- 19 cushioncontainercapsule, 2021, denim, fiber fill, sand, vinyl, velcro & zipper, 5 × 9 × 42"
- 20 cushioncontainercapsule, 2021, denim, fiber fill, sand, vinyl, velcro & zipper, 8 × 13 × 53"

Amina Ross

- Sonic Rupture: songs for(e) the swarm, (2020 – ongoing)
- 21 untitled, (2020 – ongoing), rainwater from gutters
- 22 Emotional Weather (intro), 2021, digital print on paper, quilting pins, 192 × 108"
- 23 Earthward (Reprise), 2021, quilted digital print on poly satin blend, machine embroidery, hand embroidery, batting, plywood, steel, casters, bolts, moss, stainless steel. Quilting by Patricia Russell, Embroidery by ABCD Embroidery and Anngillian Cruz*, 120 × 120 × 34.5"
- 24 Rest (Refrain), 2021, steel, work shirts, dimensions variable

Works not physically present in the space but available online:

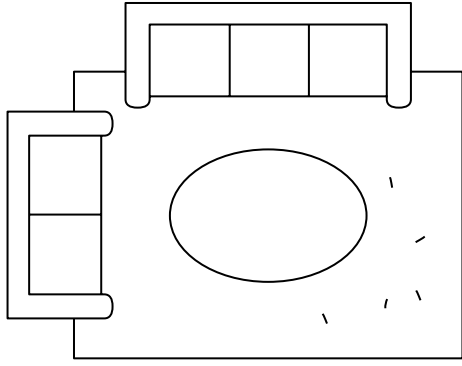
- 25 Cartography of Labor 001, 2021, PDF, designed by Alvin Ashiatey
- 26 The Underling's Vision, 2020 – 2021, poem
- 27 The Underling's Vision, 2020**, audio, vocals by Kainoah McKenzie Ross, lyrics by Amina Ross
- 28 Lay Low, 2021**, audio, vocals and production by Amma Whatt, lyrics by Amina Ross



* Additional labor outlined in "Cartography of Labor 001"

** Throughout the course of the exhibition at unspecified times the artist will utilize the space as a lab for movement and choreography research. During these moments sound will be audible.

Cameron Clayborn



I think biography is a necessary and vital way to begin working. The fact that people want to reject personal history, I find to be kind of cold. I feel like it's something about wanting to not own up to their own narrative, especially in relationship to a body like mine. It's like, "no, we don't want to know what your story is because that means we have to recontextualize our own."¹

I don't want to shift or morph outside of my body. I'm actually really into my body. I love being Brown. I love the color brown. It's such a diverse color; it has so many associations, like dirt and mud and coffee and chocolate. Do I want those associations? How do I feel about them? Brown is such an inherently complex color that I feel like I wish more people would approach it. I think one thing that comes with abstraction — especially Blackness and abstraction² — is that there has always been this strange interplay throughout history, of when do you go so far that you are no longer really positive yourself about the subject within the artwork?

I am definitely very emotional with my work. It's not sappy; it's not like boyfriend art. But it does come from an emotional place in regards to family. I'm obsessed with everything inside of the house. I did a performance that referenced the carpet and layout of the upstairs bedroom of my dad's house, in the room that I stay when I visit him. Or I made works a year or two ago out of popcorn ceiling and paint — the main impetus was because in my grandma's house, she had a popcorn ceiling, which is a common feature of Southern homes. I see it almost

like a little piece of skin; it has actually started to look more like a shell, which I'm super into. I like working with a material that you don't know necessarily how the shape will occur. For me, it has something to do with texture — like the materiality of the popcorn ceiling from my grandma's house — I feel like the textures are related to what the objects are trying to communicate.

For my thesis, scale was really important. I have never really done a large installation of this sort. I just have an apprehension towards large sculpture, especially for myself. A challenge became how I could play with scale, without making a large set of objects or a large object. Large drawings felt a little bit weirder — also because they are directly applied to the wall. They seem like they are almost consuming the wall itself. I have been drawing for a little while but it had never been a focal point of my practice until quarantine, because then I was able to really focus and challenge myself by making things bigger.

I started making a lot of other drawings, very much like zoomed in portions of a petri dish or tiny little organisms. I've also been obsessed with this idea of zooming in and zooming out. This is going to sound a little Afrofuturist, or kind of like speculative science fiction: I have started to wonder exactly what particles animate my energy or my body. I'm not trying to recreate some sort of science, but I'm just thinking maybe I'm actually composed of flowers, or I'm composed of pink. And all that is happening within me, and it is a way to establish a sense of self.

As far as how the drawings interplay with the cushioncontainercapsules — which is what I call them: I think that's kind of one of the more complex parts about how I'm working now. I feel like everything — sculpture, drawing, performance — sort of operates on its own, but still underneath the same totality. This isn't anything new — this is from research into African religions,³ where they talk about how everything is interconnected. I understand the works to be disparate in their own right, but then also connected to something larger, which is the practice itself.

it clings



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The crux of my work is to always be as honest as possible. I feel like when you stop being honest, you can almost feel it — just say what you want to say. I’ve been wary of artistic speak. There is a time and place for a certain language, but I also think that it can be exploited. I think about: how do I talk like a normal person and still say what I’m doing?

I was reading about the idea of the alma mater, which translates to “nourishing mother” in Latin. I feel almost like I came back to school looking for another home, looking for another place to find space. I’ve definitely been vibing off the idea of homes and incubators, and spaces to incubate into.

And now, once I get out of here, it is going to be a little tricky to find that again. But I’m excited, because then it will be on my own terms. This can be a moment of being able to cut ties, of institutional support — but also cut ties between origin point, of always trying to obsess over how I came to know this, or do this. I feel like any time you are in your late 20s, you start to think⁴: what were they trying to teach me, and do I need to take any of that with me as I go forward?

— As told to Alex Fialho

1 Azoulay, Ariella. *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*. Verso, 2019.

2 Godfrey, Mark, et al. “Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power.” *Notes on Black Abstraction*, Not Indicated, D.A.P./Tate, 2017, pp. 147–91.

3 Doumbia, Adama, and Naomi Doumbia. *The Way of the Elders: West African Spirituality & Tradition*. Llewellyn Publications, 2004.

4 “Saturn’s Return and Its Significance in Astrology.” *LiveAbout*, 31 May 2019.

A sincere thank you for guiding me and assisting me through this work to Joe Cottrell, Jesse “Granny” Clayborn, Veronica “Momma” Clayborn, Courtney Clayborn, Kirk Clayborn, Ramonda Clayborn, Miles Jackson, Vihanga Sontam, Brittney Leeanne Williams, and Oscar Chavez.





Installation view

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cushioncapsule (detail)



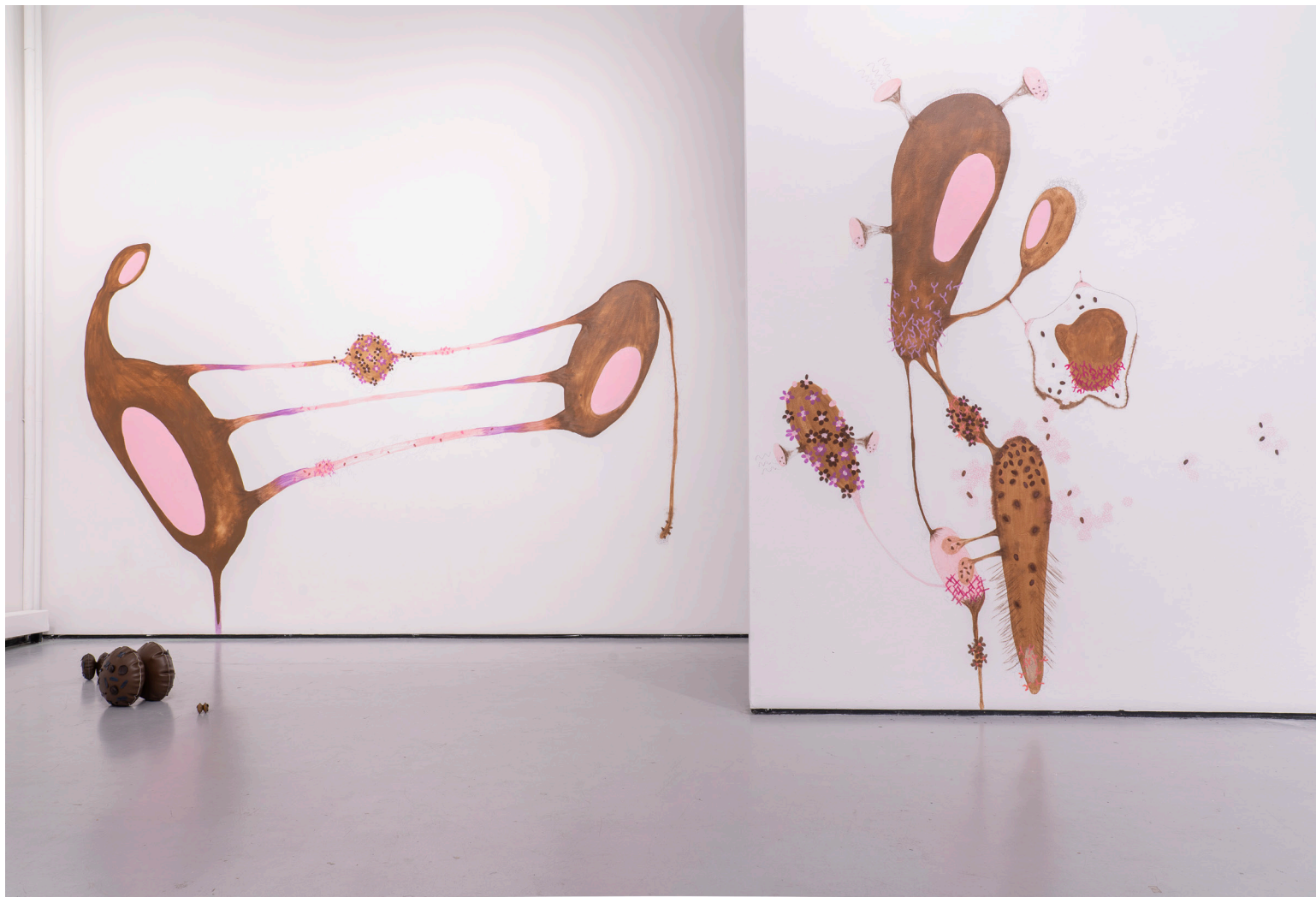
cushioncapsule, 2021
Fiber fill, vinyl, velcro
12 × 13.5 × 12"



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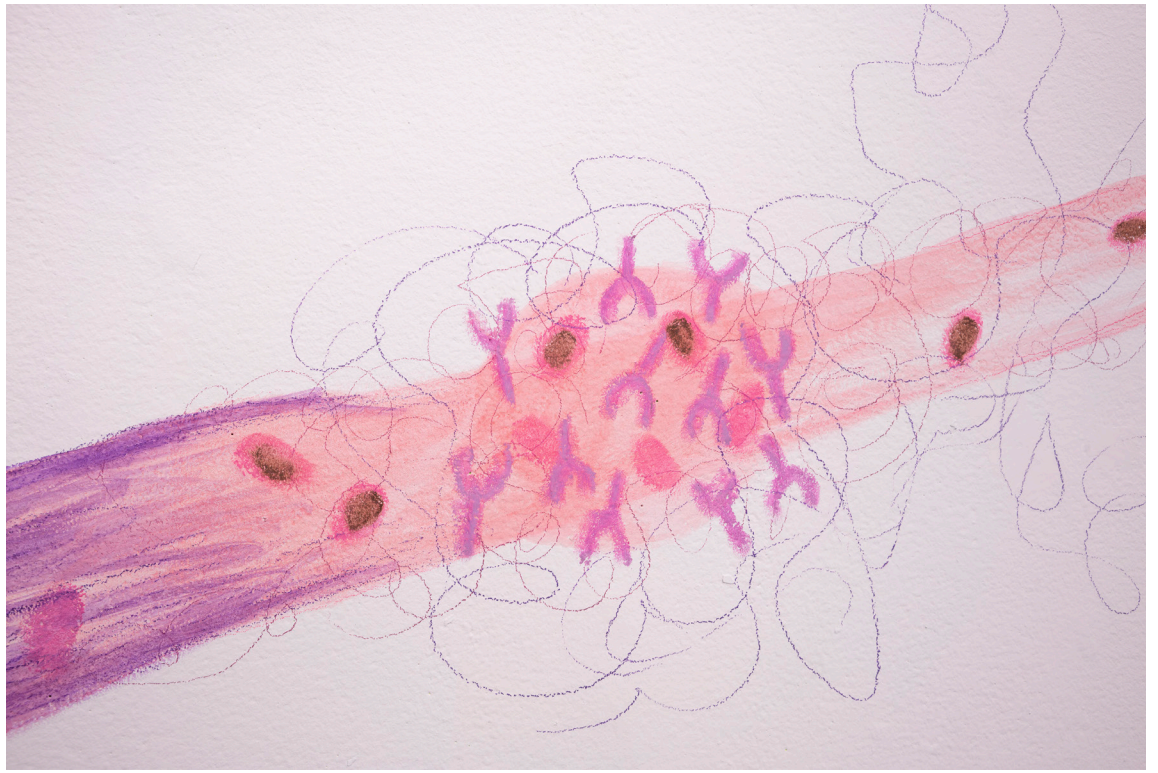
*made from scratch (mural 1)
and (mural 2), 2021*
Colored pencil, latex paint,
oil pastel

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made from scratch (mural 1) (detail)



sssssspppphhffff (detail), 2020
Oil pastel, colored pencil, watercolor
51.25 × 51.5"



moooorphing (detail), 2020
Oil pastel, colored pencil, watercolor

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Installation view of
cushioncontainercapsules



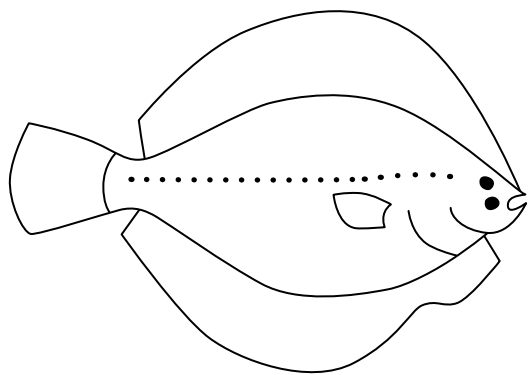
cushioncontainercapsule (detail), 2021
Denim, fiber fill, pink insulation, sand,
vinyl, velcro, zipper
5 × 9 × 38.5"

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Kevin Hernández Rosa



Located within the public Hartford School District within which Kevin Hernández Rosa grew up, the John C. Clark Jr. Elementary School¹ closed after 2,000 times the EPA federally-regulated levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were found within the air. PCBs, commonly used in construction between the 1930s and 1970s, are toxic chemicals that slowly become airborne over time, causing cancer along with a host of disturbances to mental well-being, particularly after prolonged exposure.² Even with the school's closing, many questions still lingered: How long were these chemicals seeping into the lungs of students, teachers, and staff? How many other schools within the district have this problem? How does Hartford, as a community, cope with the knowledge of potential bodily and mental corrosion within a site meant to nurture them? How can you trust again?

Within Hernández Rosa's multi-work installation thesis, the dangerous mundane of our classrooms and homes — whether it be drano, aerosols, or junk food — becomes entrapped. In *Untitled*, a large pinwheel, situated upon a classic school desk, conceals febreze canisters behind each spoke, and is suspended from its pedagogical plinth by a tendril of cheeto dust and resin. In this tenuous image, the very unnaturalness of the hot orange hue of chemical food dyes, which stains our tongues and fingertips, is brought into sharp relief with the potential toxicity of certain forms of education — the Clark School's contamination with PCBs and the US and Canada's long standing history of Native American boarding schools, being just two

examples. In *MASS CATCHER*, another cheeto dust formation is this time deprived of its saturation and modeled into the shape of a medieval man-catcher, reminding us that not all education is necessarily chosen, nor desired. Just as young minds are formed over time, they can just as well be corroded from things seen and unseen, known and unknown.

By ensnaring the volatile nature of the chemicals with which we surround ourselves daily, the artist not only provides viewers reprieve from, but also newfound awareness of the sharp and toxic materials made tangible and enmeshed within their practice. Like encountering the apex predator within a zoo, confronting the hazardous materials within Hernández Rosa's installations reveals a tension within our previous sense of safety and sudden realization of vulnerability. In doing so, these toxins suffuse the installation space, permeating and availing the boundaries between outside and inside, clarity and obscurity, human and non-human. This is largely in part of harmful chemicals' ability to impart lasting change within living things as it seeps between layers of flesh or tissue. Even when these materials exit the body, their contact with even our most formidable organs — such as the brain — can leave them permanently altered. In this sense, humans are reminded of their chemicality, defenses made permeable, and (in the most extreme of cases) separations we may take for granted, fluid or merged.³

These breakdowns of fixity or assuredness over our borders — bodily or otherwise — imbues the forms Hernández Rosa makes with an ephemerality: the tendril-like forms of cheetos in resin seems to lie in waiting of release from its posture, the laminated shattered glass of (*desublimated. effigy/monument*) seems to only stall the shard's further destruction. Within their work, these boundaries become the site of creation and fixation, rather than a precipice to be passed through for the finality of either domestication or death. In doing so, the artist makes the reliable unreliable, and the once-assured unpromised. In hovering hold, an aluminium road sign, stripped of its location and consonant letters, is laid to rest on the ground. Its deterioration of that which is often taken as a given in logic and clarity directly. What happens

it clings



like a leech

when our dependable mechanisms of safety fail or become incomprehensible to us?

This question continues to plague parents and teachers pushing for further testing of other Hartford public schools four years after the closing of Clark Elementary.⁴ Contamination breaches places we often do not think to, or cannot, reinforce; contamination finds our weakest points while destroying the barriers we create to protect ourselves and those we love. While we can take steps to know toxicity, we surrender to its pervasiveness. For many, reprieve from the onslaught of toxic materials is inaccessible and unimaginable. Yet, through Hernández Rosa's fixations on these corrosive materials that can gnaw through bodies, steel, and minds alike, our noxious terrors become discipline. In doing so, the sculptures force a reckoning with our poisonous nightmares — if only for a moment.

But even in this examination, there is an understanding that this promise of distance is not lasting: our structures of security unfound, and perhaps the very ground beneath our feet unstable.

How can you trust again?

— Joseph Zordan

1 41.786880,-72.678070

2 Dan Corcoran and Gabriella Iannetta, "Hartford School Permanently Closed Over PCBs in Air" (2016). NBC Connecticut.

3 While not directly quoted if one wishes for further reading, Mel Y. Chen's *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* provides further insight in the permeableness of bodies and toxic materials, most notably in the Metals section of their work.

4 Rebecca Lurye, "Parents, teachers push for testing Hartford schools for toxic PCBs" (2020). Hartford Courant.

Kevin Hernández Rosa is a wandering artist, attuned to the sequences and contours of the world around him. He has been an artist since he can remember. Growing up in a Pentecostal household, his family believed that God entrusts people with spiritual gifts — his being artistry. In middle school, Hernández Rosa was introduced to the invigorating graffiti scene of Hartford, Connecticut. By age 15, he had begun tagging on the streets and working as part of a graffiti crew, sometimes laboring to finish larger pieces for six hours at a time. Working with a crew introduced him to a code of ethics and situated him within a collaborative environment alongside other artists.⁵ Hernández Rosa's early years as a graffiti artist cultivated his dedication to wandering and discovering the world around him — a commitment that has carried through to his sculptural installation works. "I began looking closely at architecture, always paying attention to my surroundings," he explains.

With his attention to his surroundings came an acute awareness of the contradictions of space: cultural blind spots, what it means to be a citizen, who is brutalized, and who is not. Questions that Hernández Rosa had prior to his graffiti artist days, such as "who owns what? The politics of private property, how things get distributed... what do we deem to be beautiful or not?" primed his explorations of the social world and the built environment. For Hernández Rosa, the world is an archive: there are layers of meaning, art, politics, and possibilities to be inspected. In contrast to hyper-capitalist notions of art — focused on normative standards of beauty and commodification — Hernández Rosa's philosophy includes anarchist ideology, distinct from more commonplace preoccupations with private property and racial capitalism.

I garnered a sense of critical hope from Hernández Rosa; he believes in art as a mode to address the facts of life, but is skeptical of the Art World's collusion with capitalist standards of aesthetics and ownership. Yet, what continued to slip away from my grasp of understanding is how a graffiti artist, wandering the streets and working in collaboration with other graffiti artists, could possibly bring that worldview into the white cube that is his current role as a Yale MFA student working in his studio



and exhibiting in gallery spaces. He answered my inquiry with grace, stating: “I do not experience the studio as confinement. It is no different than a blank book for graffiti sketches.” Pushing him further, I asked, “Is it really blank, though? You enter the space with predetermined narratives of what it means to be a student, artist, and sculptor, right?” He clarified that his art is not there to affirm or critique grand narratives. More important than the Art World’s take on his work within preset narratives is Hernández Rosa’s own meditative practice of artmaking as a contemplative method. He hopes his work encourages viewers to slow down and experience the work as durational, with meanings unfolding over time.

This is why wandering artists, in their refusal of totalizing theories and grand narratives, pose a challenge to the techniques of mainstream artistry. Whereas some work provides clear-cut, consumable answers that meet viewers’ expectations, Hernández Rosa’s work plays in ambiguity.⁶ I experienced in real time how Hernández Rosa’s philosophy of art is flexible, everchanging, and allows for a spectrum of thought. After my provocations about the gallery space and its limits, he stated, “well, maybe I am somewhat indoctrinated.” His both/and-ism began to emerge prominently at this point in our interview, as he explained that these concepts of indoctrination VS freedom, the gallery VS the street, exist on a spectrum. Allowing for this fluidity in his own practice, there is no one-sided answer to the question of where graffiti stops and his sculptural practice starts — instead, there is a flow.

If it is impossible to extract a normative “art history” from Hernández Rosa’s art practice, then perhaps the intellectual, aesthetic, and ethical possibilities exist elsewhere. “That’s the anarchy, the freedom...not everything needs an answer,” he elaborates. He returns again to the question of spectrums, clarifying that “my work is not about abiding by boundaries and binaries of, for example, masculinity and femininity. When I’m working, I’m not thinking about masculinity and femininity, although I am deeply in touch with both.”

Hernández Rosa’s work cannot be contained. Critics have often been confused with what they

read as his minimalism, something I found striking especially given the risk and clamor of graffiti practice. His works are instilled with a sense of tranquility, even when symbolizing precarity. “What does it mean to emulate situations that you see in the world but still hold back?” he ponders out loud.

Those who have the pleasure of visiting his thesis installation will soon recognize how his aesthetic and political philosophies — rooted in a pursuit of meaning, attention to the world around him, and the fluidity of life — bear on the works themselves in ways that are simultaneously opaque and apparent. A windmill teeters on the edge of a child’s desk: it recalls public education, possibly Hartford’s closed and forgotten schools, but also the yearning and precarity of the experience of being on the edge — open to erotic or open-ended explanations. Hernández Rosa is unwilling to choose a side: graffiti or the gallery, social critique, or embodied exploration. These are questions engineered by normative art history, not by the actual symbiosis of aesthetics, ethics, and everyday life.

In another aspect of his practice, Hernández Rosa conserved shards of a speaker cabinet, an object that was destroyed by him and his colleagues while processing an experience of racial violence. Together, they broke it beyond repair, and he sought to maintain its charged energy by laminating the debris with packing tape. A wheel from a baby carriage is covered in crustaceans and welded onto a flagpole ground sleeve — carrying its own associations of strength and perseverance, although not in its expected outdoor site. These are among the wandering associations and experiments that bring the unexpected and the vernacular into the gallery.

I might call it his sculptural and architectural opacity, or maybe his anti-capitalist refusal of art as a commodity, as fitting into a particular marketplace. Or maybe it is beyond elaboration in words — instead, requiring perusal of the works for an extended period of time, reflecting on who we are in relation to his sculpture, allows possibilities to unfold gradually.

— Alexandra M. Thomas

it clings



like a leech

5 “Afterword.” The Art of Getting over: Graffiti at the Millenium, by Stephen Powers, St. Martin’s Press, 1999, pp. 154–155.

6 Hernández Rosa has provided the following text for further reading:

“There is no principle of hierarchy or priority among the components of the work. The following then seem to be legitimate inferences. There are millions of other possible re-orderings of these figments (fragments) of day/night and nothing to indicate that anyone is more or less valid as fiction than the ordering published. The residue of the fiction is then not the final disposition of the fragments but the motions of the consciousness that disposes of them according to the rules we have traced, and no doubt to others we have failed to trace. The subject of *Lessness* is the plight of consciousness in a void, compelled to reflect on itself, capable of doing so only by splitting itself and recombining the fragments in wholes which are never greater than the sums of their parts. This endless enterprise of splitting and recombining is language, and it offers not the promise of the charm, the ever-awaited magical combination that will bring wealth or salvation, but the solace of the game, the killing of time.” From J. M. Coetzee’s “Samuel Beckett’s *Lessness*: An Exercise in De-composition.” *Computers and the Humanities*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Mar., 1973), pp.195–198.

The following essays were drafted days before the “final” installation of *41.786880,-72.678070, either chicken bones or glazed dandelions popping around the knees*, 2021. Some works referred to within the essays have since then been altered, elaborated upon or otherwise truncated.

A special thank you to those who aided in the physical and conceptual manifestation of this work: Pap Souleye Fall, Amina Ross, Audrey H. Ryan, Nicholas Serrambana, Arien Wilkerson, Marissa Williamson, and Emmaleigh Pepe-Winshell.

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*41.786880,-72.678070, either
chicken bones or glazed dandelions
popping around the knees, 2021*

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(desublimated. effigy/monument)
 (detail), 2021
 Sunn 410 SR speaker cabinet,
 packing tape



(desublimated. effigy/monument), 2021
 Sunn 410 SR speaker cabinet,
 packing tape

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*41.786880,-72.678070, either
chicken bones or glazed dandelions
popping around the knees, 2021*

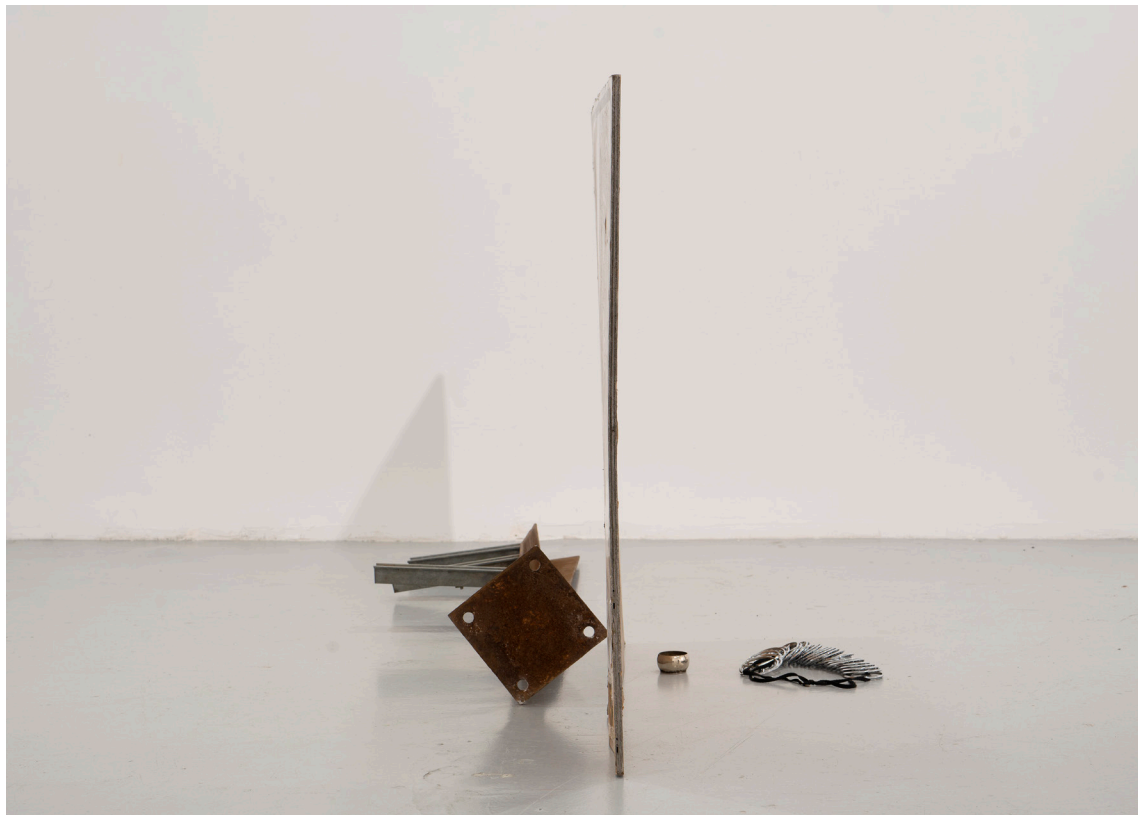


*Untitled (Pinwheel) (detail), 2021
Utz cheese balls, epoxy, paper-
mâché, steel mesh, steel, auto-
matic air fresheners, found earring,
found sticker, found dollar*

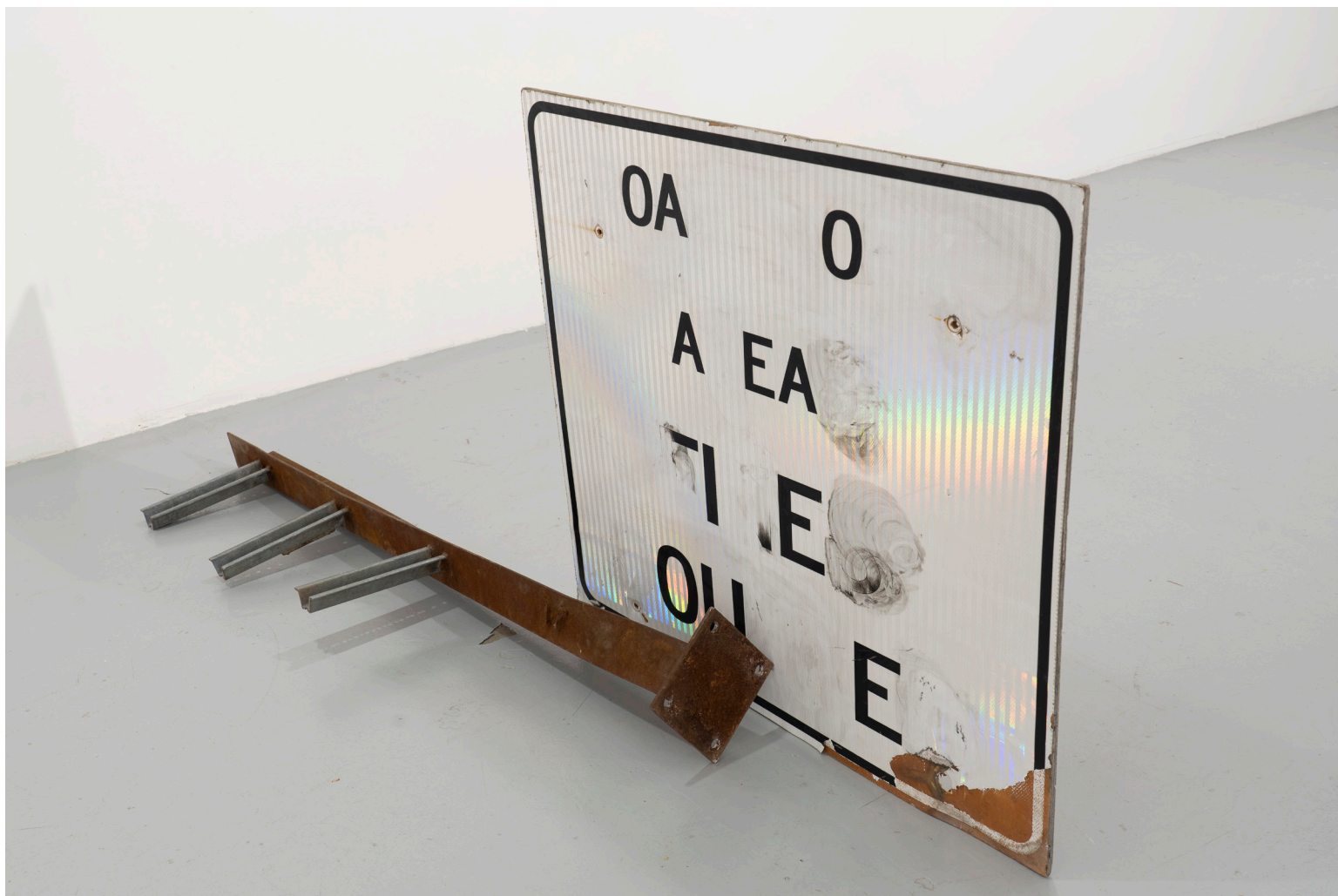
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hovering hold, 2021
Street sign, signposts, steel
bracket, hardware



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MASS CATCHER, 2021
Broomstick, Utz cheese balls, epoxy



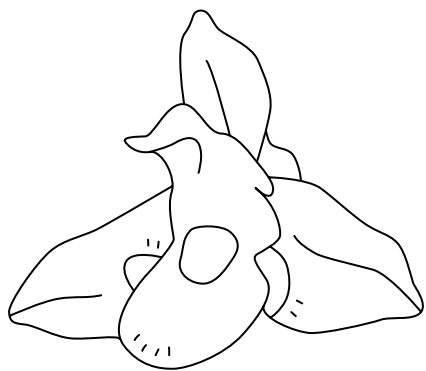
Flag (detail), 2021
Sea debris, galvanized corrugated
steel tube, steel

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Diana Sofia Lozano



I encounter Diana Sofia Lozano's work in our present moment, which is dominated by virality. The fear of viral matter — in the air, in the grocery store, in our friends — and the unknowability of its spread make us retreat into isolated spaces. There is worthwhile safety in this antiseptic seclusion, although it is lonely. In our viral age, luxury is not only decadence but the ability to distance oneself from dirt.

Lozano asks us to reconsider the ethics of dirt, of seepage, of slime, fluid, and rot. Where her work resides, in the botanical world, luxury and dirt are not antonyms. Braided armatures of hardened steel are woven through with mossy and dreaded wools. Sifted on the ground is a residue that conjures sweet pollen the color of honeysuckle; in a different light, it takes on the harshness of sulfur. Suspended at the tips of the sculpture's steel arms are open boats — “pods” — that carry pollinic forms and an unknown, unctuous substance that smells of piña colada and garden dirt, like sick earth. Here is a sticky deliverance, an offering.

Where can you find this plant but here? Not in Linnaeus' *Species Plantarum*, where 6,000 botanical species come into unfamiliar names, a taxonomical regulation of colonial design. Do not dare name it. The bent steel, wools, and sludgy admixture, its sap, slip between these narrow nomenclatures. If it discomfits you, that's the point. Naming is an act of enclosure. Botanical taxonomy — the nomenclature we use to make the world of plants legible through spoken and written languages —

is the product of violent colonial expedition under the pursuit of European Enlightenment. These “voyages of discovery” from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries produced a new botanical science in the deathly pursuit of capital. Imagining plants from stolen archipelagoes to be profitable, colonizers extracted and intentionally distorted indigenous knowledges of these plants for their gain, naming them as a means of owning them.¹ These are the names we have inherited.

In the space of Lozano's creation, this plant has no roots, or if it does, they are not dug into the earth-en ground, resting instead firmly on the cement gallery floor, as though they had been yanked from the soil for closer inspection by human eyes.

Its uprootedness, an everyday violence in the world of plants, recalls that much of botanical illustration has been rendered using “herbarium specimen,” where the species is, in fact, already dead, revitalized only through the clever imagination of the illustrator. Killing for the function of naming raises the stakes of botanical imagery to more than an innocent sport, akin to dressing up a cadaver.

The plant's solitary isolation in the gallery recalls the formal qualities of botanical illustrations themselves, where plants named for European men² are rendered as austere black-and-white diagrams, stems, leaves, and flowering buds hovering against a blank white background. In the pursuit of “scientific accuracy” and rationalized “neutrality,” these technical drawings redact all trace of the ecology in which plants grow. Other ways of knowing these plants — the delicate smell of nectar secretion, or the numbing touch of a plant's downy hairs — are ecosocial intimacies rendered marginal next to the privileged modality of “seeing.”

Our implication in the work is unstable, slippery, not unlike the dewy fluid that runs down the spine of a plant. The sculpture overtakes any viewer who encounters it, destabilizing any prior assumptions about scale. Has the plant been magnified or have we shrunk down? At this new resolution, what becomes clearer? The feeling of being dwarfed by this encounter is intensified as

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the viewer confronts a wall of mirrors. By refracting the body infinitely across the room, the viewer is dispersed like a virus, like a vine, like a dandelion weed making one million more of itself. The pollen is no longer richly yellow but a chrome-polished mirror, fracturing a formerly clear reflection of self.

— Josie Roland Hodson

1 O'Donnell, Rachel. "Imperial Plants: Modern Science, Plant Classification and European Voyages of Discovery." *Graduate Journal of Social Science*. Vol. 7 Issue 1 (2010): 59–72.

2 Linnaeus wrote that botanists have the: "religious duty to engrave the names of men on plants, and so secure for them immortal renown" (Schiebinger, Londa. "Feminist History of Colonial Science." *Hypatia*, 19(1), (2004): 233–254. doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2004.tb01276.x.)

Escape the anthropocentric hidden in our acts of naming; teach us a looking that does not collide with the limits built into the logic of our language.

What acts would a flower use to name itself in lieu of words? We know our syllables don't unfold with our multitudes, they can't re-link to fit what we are yet to grow into; they stop short in time.

I'm carried off to the ineffable on the extension of these oozing ligatures, their meshed textures and colors. Does reaching reveal intention? Desire? Bright colors bring pollinators, initiate dissemination. These beings claim no home turf; the garden houses only the invasive. Left to its own devices it seethes at us in all the ways proliferation pervades atmosphere; leaky fluids and the vapors of overripe sweetness choose dispersal over confinement in physical shape.

Their generative moves might reach out to grow through us too or drop spores into our deepening ground. We are not necessary but we present another opportunity for these structures to fulfill their need to vary. That mingled whiff of sweet earth and skin beckons us like bees to bright petals. Whether soil-rooted or white-cubed, flora need a way to bring us close, to enlist us in their ongoing dispersal. Their adaptations stem from an evolving expertise in capturing other lifeforms.

This knowledge is draped over, dragged along the object's development: a braided longevity that keeps excess in the third strand of a double helix. These materials do not meld so much as they conjoin, confront, come to a head with each other, and interweave resources of various space. Unresolved alloys keep difference visible at close quarters; it is a hyphenated invention, a proliferation of dashes between an increasing array of materials, and the promise of wider gathering to come.

Is there a non-anthropocentric way to explore intimacy or establish kinship? It might help to start from *their* need. We can catalog to a bestiary of possible carriers, if we let our questions give way to want. How we see may admit or require distance, but the haptics of smell and leakage offer more troubling presence, the lacquer dripping off these mouths makes me want to touch. Here the

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boundary between invitation and interdiction,
stillness and vibrance, gets fuzzy.

I am drawn toward the dangerous pleasure of inter-
laced differences in this work. It defies the unity
it takes for a name or meaning to stick, and recov-
ers the erased intimacies that undermine that
rigidity. Its dimensions expand beyond an indi-
vidual gaze so we have to braid our looking over
The Sweetness of the Hold, Otherwise Unseen.

— Tobi Kassim

* “Viscosity is an experience that repels in its own right, in the view of
Jean-Paul Sartre. His remarks on the phenomenon of stickiness may
cast some light on the ancient attitude toward love: ‘...Its stickiness is a
trap, *it clings like a leech*; it attacks the boundary between myself and it.”
— Anne Carson, “Losing the Edge” from *Eros the Bittersweet*, pg. 40

* “All we can hope for is to brush upon the edges of [plant] being[s],
which is altogether outer and exposed, and in so doing to grow past the
fictitious shells of our identity and our existential ontology.”
— Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, pg. 13

A special thank you to those who aided in the
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Emma Safir, Edith Santiago, and Jacinda Tran.

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*The Sweetness of the Hold,
Otherwise Unseen, 2021*
Steel, wire, dyed wool felt,
pigmented resin clay, epoxy resin,
sewing pins, silicone, "Bermuda
Triangle" fragrance oil, "Garden
Dirt" fragrance oil, dark corn
syrup, craft sand, cast aluminum,
mirrored acrylic
Sculpture: 16 × 14 × 8'
Installation: dimensions variable

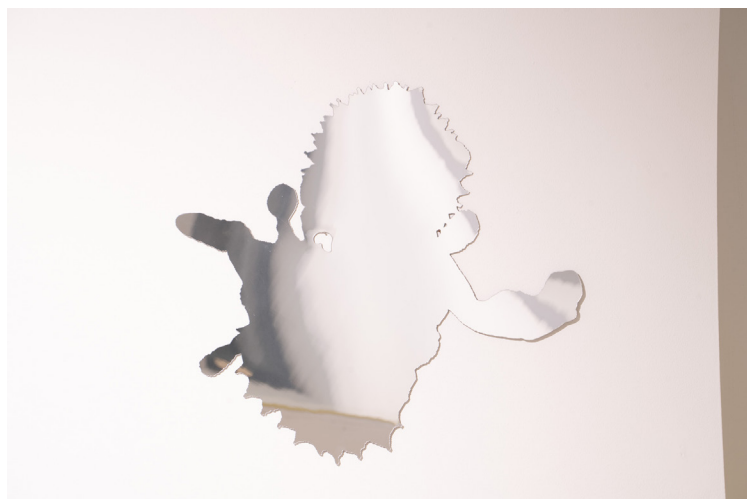
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*The Sweetness of the Hold,
Otherwise Unseen, 2021*



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*The Sweetness of the Hold,
Otherwise Unseen, 2021*

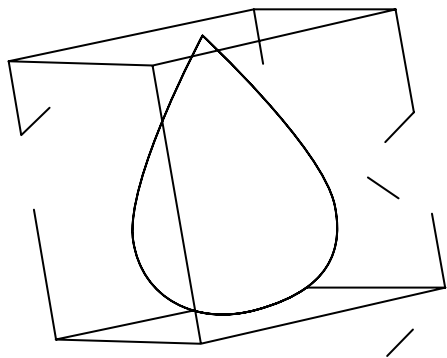


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Amina Ross



Writing this piece dismantles any assumption of the art critic as someone who can fully consume and dissect the work of a calculating and unruly Black queer artist. With the spectre of COVID-19 and its strain on art criticism, I must admit the invigorating challenge posed by writing about a soon-to-be installed and activated work without the usual rituals of several studio visits — that privileged opportunity for a Black feminist art critic to witness a sibling-comrade’s work emerge from a mess of materials on a studio floor into a thesis-worthy product. This adds another layer of opacity and mystery to Ross’s already-fugitive practice, and thus requires viewers to adopt a speculative and otherworldly method of looking.

The work is a sculptural installation, a game board, a dance floor, and a bed. Its materialization as a poetic and tangible space invites a medley of fleshy possibilities: dancing, playing, sleeping, loving. Experiencing this during the pandemic gives the work’s haptic and intimate qualities an elegiac sense. The crowded sanctuary of a nightclub, casual romantic trysts in beautiful strangers’ beds, a nostalgia-filled afternoon of vintage board games — all these joyous happenings now feel so ancient. Even before our subjection to pandemic precautions, Ross has maintained a fondness for small-scale gatherings. When I discussed early designs of these newest works with them, the artist referenced the potential of commissioning performers to interact with the dance floor, recorded by a drone. Lens-based technology and embodied performance

make their way into Ross’s sculptural imagination. In early plans for the work, a billboard-like screen/frame portrays a still from one of the artist’s moving image works — an outtake from *Emotional Weather* (2020).¹ Not only is this an intertextual reference within the artist’s oeuvre, it also reveals their architectural mind — particularly an interest in supportive architectures. There are beams that hold up the image, but one might ponder the ways in which the bed/game/board/dancefloor hybrid object is supportive architecture as well. I am enthralled by the openness of Ross’s sculptural gesture — their vulnerability in building a space on which our political, affective, and erotic desires can act. Such a metaphor risks tautology, but there is a painterly language here, beyond the cursory understanding of a blank canvas to be filled. The abstraction — curvaceous lines and subtle, earthy coloring — of the dance floor itself is the gorgeous offspring of a painterly gaze. These mythical bodies at play on the game board or sleeping/loving on the bed further animate the quilted floorboards much like a dynamic brushstroke energizes a canvas. Ross themselves is always in motion — contemplating their next experiment with crafting psychic and physical spaces for us to enter. Said lovingly, there is no way to keep up with Amina Ross.

How do we map our own desires onto this structure? In essence, it almost becomes a stage for us to act out our own curiosity and delights regarding what embodied and affective interventions can be rendered in the gallery space. We must take heed the poetic insights Ross yields about bodies, the built environment, and an aesthetic object that continues to blossom through the yearning of the viewer.

— Alexandra M. Thomas

¹ Amina Ross, *Emotional Weather* (2020).

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The anticipated hardened laminate of a night-club dancefloor is instead supplanted by quilted fabric tiles that do not support but rather surrender to the body's mass, each padded square a mossy abstraction of dappled light-made material. Entering Ross's installation is a submersion into queer time, where future and past are not relational but simultaneous. There is no sacred teleology here; it all occurs at once, like the layered syncopations of disco.

Whereas digital renderings are the cybernated media of our present and future, quilting is an ancient labor. Over time, this patient practice has been subject to gendered and classed markings — “feminized,” “functional,” “folk.” Ross's digitally-printed fabrics suggest that quilting is a technology, domestic ingenuity that meets our needs for warmth as well as ornamental decadence, muddling the line between function and desire.

Quilts are intimate aesthetic objects that stack up at the end of bedframes, heirlooms passed down through generations' hands. Here, it is not merely the quilt as an object that has been passed down, but the process of its own making: each quilted tile has been judiciously crafted and designed in collaboration with their grandmother, Patricia Russell. This embodied act of intergenerational communion tesseracts time to produce a quilt manifested by stolen time, queer time, black time, time wrestled back from the grips of linear progression. Incidentally, the same can be said for dancing, or for sleeping.

When Ross and I talk about their grandmother's hands, I am reminded of the Freedom Quilting Bee, a sewing cooperative that produced polychromatic quilts for generations in a small hamlet south of Selma along the Alabama River. In 1972, Sears Roebuck and Company contracted the Freedom Quilting Bee to produce simple corduroy pillow covers at scale. Embarrassed by idiosyncrasy, white Sears patrons wanted something systematic, compelling the quilters to standardize their individual touch for something nearly machine-manufactured. Working against this tendency towards standardization, Ross animates the principle of quilting's striking inconsistencies, where mathematized patterns are rearticulated

through individual vision and desire; in quilt-making, sewing patterns are not inviolable law but a choreography that yields to improvisation.

Ross's installation is alive with affectionate human entanglement, ripe with the tantalizing uncertainty induced by chance encounters. On this platform of intimate relation and under darkness, whether a bed, a dance floor, or a gameboard, the next question remains the same: “whose move?”

A child's voice haunts the space with such poetic overtures: “Living inside the specter of the present we go to war everyday and still find ways to be together.” Here, the mechanisms of quilting reveal a takeaway: through violent puncture, a needle sutures two soft pieces together. We find our needle and our stray pieces and we yoke them.

— Josie Roland Hodson

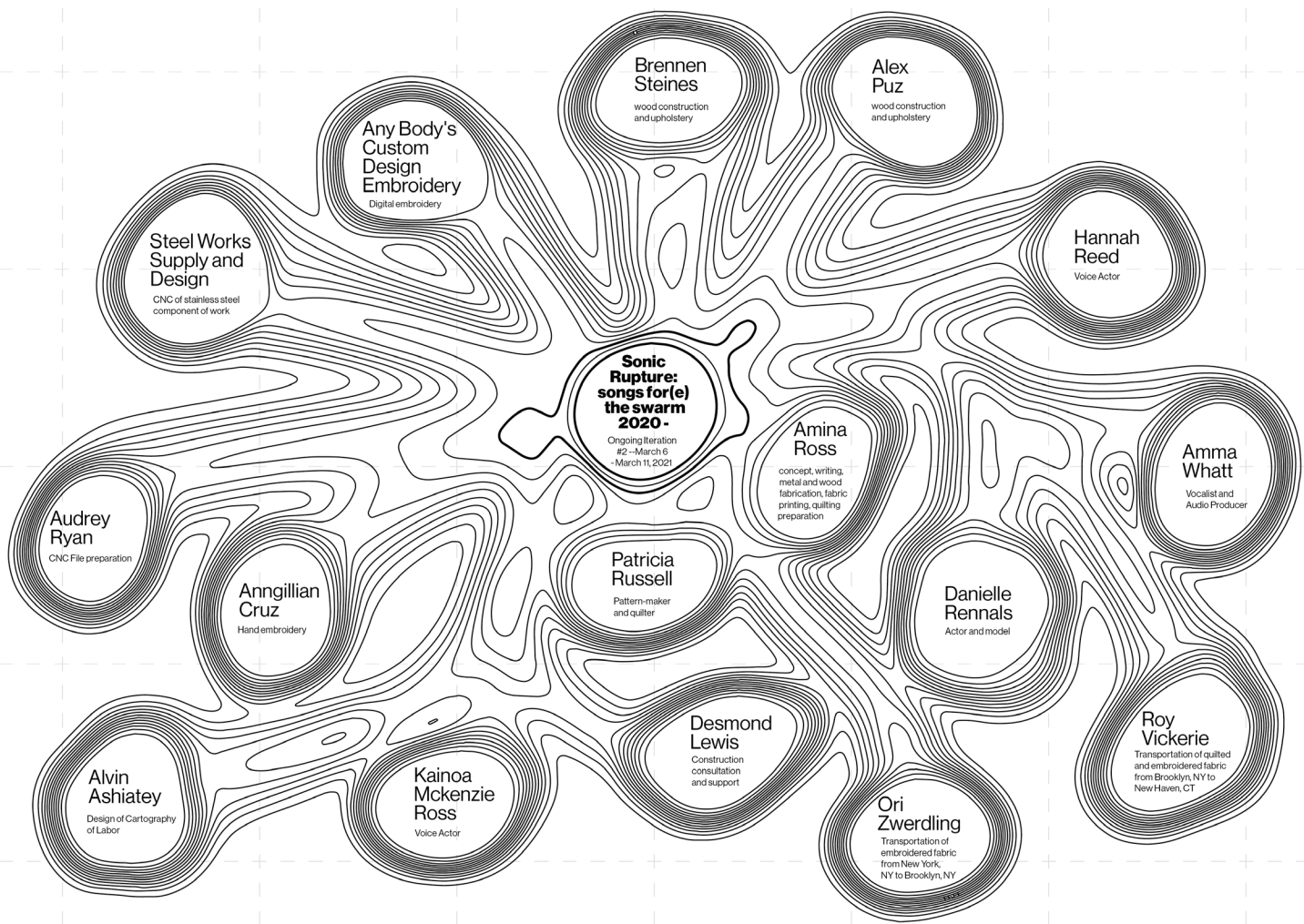
2 Arnett, William, Paul Arnett, Joanne Cubbs, and E. W. Metcalf, *Gee's Bend: the architecture of the quilt* (Tinwood Books, 2006), 91.

These short essays were conceived of as sister-pieces. While they are separately authored, they reflect a collaborative process of thinking, editing, and feeling with and through Amina Ross's practice.

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A Cartography of Labor for
Iteration #2 of *Sonic Rupture: songs for(e) the swarm* designed
by Alvin Ashiatey

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Untitled, (2020 – ongoing)
Rainwater from gutters

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Installation view of *Sonic Rupture: songs for(e) the swarm*,
(2020 – ongoing)



Emotional Weather (intro), 2021
Digital print on paper, quilting pins
192 × 108"

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Rest (Refrain), 2021
Steel, work shirts
Dimensions variable

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Earthward (Reprise) (detail), 2021
Quilted digital print on poly satin
blend, machine embroidery, hand
embroidery, batting, plywood, steel,
casters, bolts, moss, stainless steel.
Quilting by Patricia Russell, Em-
broidery by ABCD Embroidery and
Anngillian Cruz
120 × 120 × 34.5"



*Earthward (Reprise) and
Rest (Refrain)*, 2021

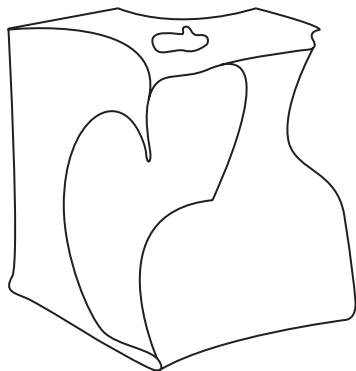


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Audrey Ryan



Two salt licks hang parallel the viewer like cuneiform tablets whose undulating depressions suggest that they were carved by cows — lick by lick by lick. In their fleshly colour and solid form, these wonderfully errant impressions index a body, specifically the organ endowed with the capability of speech. But who here speaks — human or animal?

The salt lick is a curious object. It can be artificial or natural; small piles scattered in the forest soil, or opaque rose-colored blocks that dangle like Christmas ornaments on fence posts. These mineralized spaces invite all kinds of creatures to congregate: horses, cows, sheep, deer, moose, porcupine, foxes, tapirs, and humans alike may share encounters with each other — encounters which might be at once transitory, lingering, violent, and tender.

As long as humans and non-humans have been in contact, salt has mediated many of these encounters. Historically, the paths animals made to natural mineral licks became main trails for early humans, which then became modern highways, which were then again salted to preserve modern road conditions.¹ As a long-held agricultural practice, farmers present their cows, sheep, and horses with salt licks as a way to provide nutrients they wouldn't get otherwise. The salt lick then, is a point of encounter, but its ubiquity also speaks to the anthropocenic shifts within our ecosystems.

Some viewers will be confronted by the bodily proportions of Ryan's salt licks. To look squarely at their bovine impressions, at eye level, is to experience an intimate, physical sense of similitude, affinity, and even kinship with its makers.

Ryan's oeuvre theorizes a kind of deromanticized kinship between humans and nonhumans while accounting for the affective complications of its constitutive encounters. Critically, Ryan's sculptures create a vacuum of legible mythologies or linear stories to be told about the objects with which she presents us. Two comet goldfish prepare for a fight, unknowing adversaries in cheap plastic bags. A viewer investigates the sensorial suggestions of seagulls eating cheerios, only to find themselves trapped by their unreliable narrator. These engagements are mostly absent of physical bodies, yet their presences linger in material residues: cheerios, feces, plastic, salt. Merely ghosts — of cattle, of gulls, of humans — remain fixed in space.

Donna Haraway writes that, "Without sustained remembrance, we cannot learn to live with ghosts and so cannot think."² In preserving these liminal spaces and these epistemological gaps, Ryan's work invites us to remember the ghosts with which we live. We are allowed to keep the mystery, to tend to our desires, and to stay with our ghosts — troubled as they may be.

— Rachel Mei Ling Tang

1 "Mineral Lick," (2021, January 16) in *Wikipedia*.

2 Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. (Duke University Press, 2016), 39.

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Audrey Ryan's sculptures entice their viewers to navigate loci of desire: like stages set for the many encounters between creatures and that which they might consume, subsume, excrete, occupy, and destroy.

Sometimes the viewer arrives belatedly, and is confronted with only traces of a prior exchange. This is indexed in one case by bird feces coating the gallery floor; in another by two goldfish suspended in plastic bags; in a third, by a bird's corpse laid delicately on a pile of white fleece blankets. At other times, the intimation of a set lure waiting to be tripped holds the string of time taut: honey drips through plastic tubing; doe urine seeps down into rich, dark soil; rosemary wafts its camphoraceous scent; maple syrup glides over stainless steel; a pool of golden orange apricots languishes stickily. These substances traverse sensorial registers, moving from the ground into its depths and up through the air, their circumlocutions slicing routes across space to inhabit and invade non-human and human animals alike.³

The viewer's body in the gallery space becomes the architecture around which this choreography is orchestrated, like the person in this viral Tik Tok video, who, over a period of many months, earned the trust of a hummingbird to sit and drink in their presence. Our bodies are not mere seeing machines; they occupy space as critical components of the work's signification, adding layers to its embodiment. We maneuver these liminal spaces, so redolent with contact and other intimacies. We partake. We move with trepidation, with a heightened awareness of the perils and pleasures inscribed in these scenarios of ensnarement. A great deal is at stake, playing out before us in a compelling mixture of familiar and unfamiliar terms.

Often, we are so busy imagining ourselves as apparati, as prosthetic for this encounter between the bird and its nectar — even as an armature facilitating a meeting of two things — that we may, at first, look away from our own entrapment. We walk with felicity along the prescribed path, we lean toward and then away, we consume, excrete, consume, excrete. Hunter and hunted, pursuer and prey — these relations coalesce and their

distinctions collapse, becoming tautological at a physical level, as what captures us allures us, and what we escape is also that which we pursue.

— Nora Mitchell Rosengarten

3 I am thinking of Mel Chen's work on chemical intimacies in their many forms. See: Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Duke University Press, 2012).

* Text formed by Tobi Kassim and Audrey Ryan
A flythrough
Whose means are piped through
A denatured byproduct
Trace infiltrates through waste
Justifyly®

Thank you to those who helped me bring this project to fruition: Kevin Hernández Rosa, Tobi Kassim, the Kesslers, Desmond Lewis, Thomas and Alexis Ryan, Anahita Vossoguhi, and Riley Duncan.

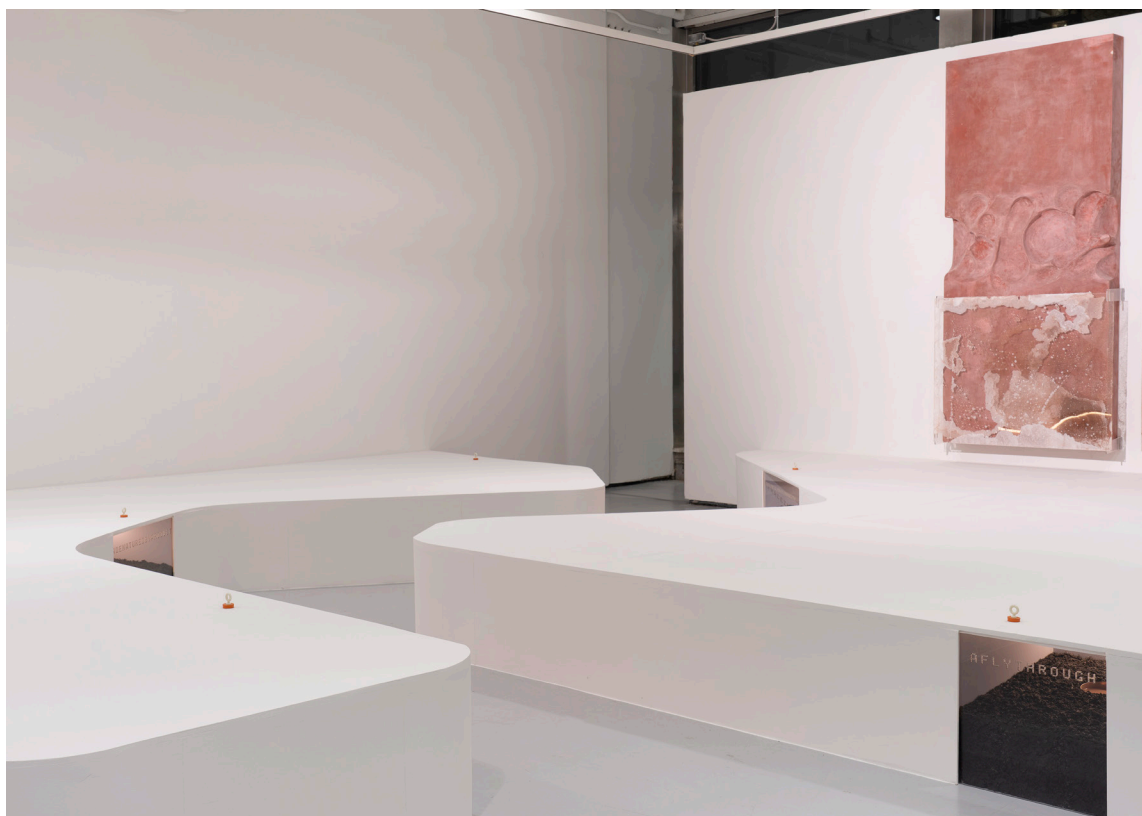
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Stamped upon, 2021



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Two licks, 2021
Foam, plastic, Plexiglas®, aluminum, trace mineral salt

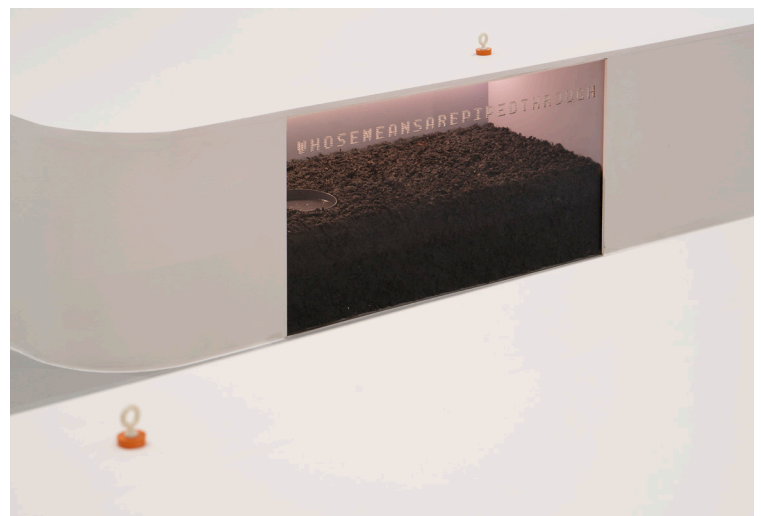
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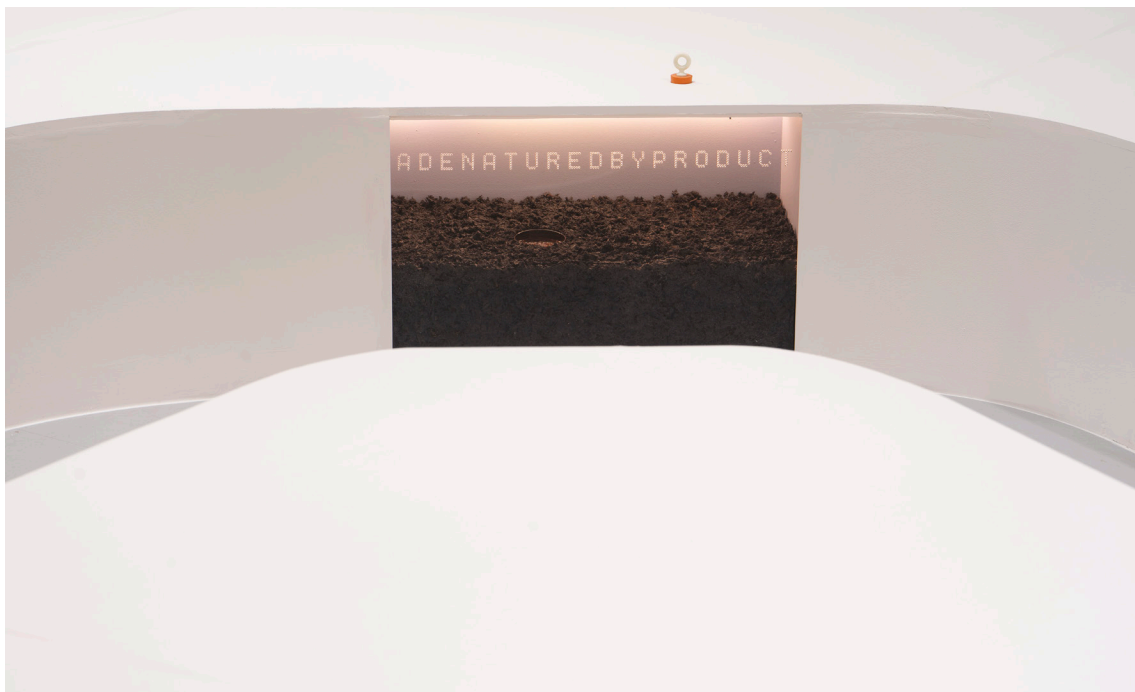
JustiFLY insert, 2021
 Black Kow® manure, flies, glass
 dishes, sugar water, Plexiglas®,
 chemical plug
 Text formed with Tobi Kassim



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JustiFLY insert, 2021
 Black Kow® manure, flies, glass
 dishes, sugar water, Plexiglas®,
 chemical plug
 Text formed with Tobi Kassim

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JustiFLY insert, 2021
(view from 1156 Chapel Street)



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