

laissez faire et laissez passer

HANNAH BEERMAN

BRIAN YIHURN BYUN

ELIZABETH HARNEY

EMILY JANOWICK

JUDY KOO

JESSICA MENSCH

PATRICK CARLIN MOHUNDRO

ANDY RALPH

JORDAN STOHL

	<p>Centered in the right to liberty, <i>laissez-faire</i> ideology assumes that the self-interested consumption and production of individuals will result in a self-regulating economic order; that capitalism is a natural force, and individuals are the substrate through which it manifests. Fair enough—in this city, it is impossible not to take part in capitalism. Being requires transaction. Even in the non-market fluctuations of our individual desiring and giving, sociality is an exchange. We are merely trading in alternate stocks.</p>
<p><u>And the true product of this restaurant, that cost \$200 per person to experience, was the illusion that life is worth living—AKA, a good time. 'How to transform emotional experience into economic profit.' When this title appeared at a slideshow during a monetary seminar given by the front of house manager... I thought of Adorno and shed a stream of tears.</u></p> <p>Chang Yuchen, <i>Use Value: a Shanzhai Lyric</i>, November 2019.</p>	<p>Art is another calculation, translating between labor, emotion, and value—the drama of wealth disparity and disappointed Utopia played out in speculation on drawing, sculpture, performance, and paint. Culture offers a self-contradictory cocktail of visionary aspiration and social currency, claims to free expression countered by the reality of institutionalized exclusion. For more than 100 years, artists have sought alternatives to a culture based on the accumulation of value through prestige, but the market's power has staved off change.</p>
<p><u>I told myself I would try not to use the material of the politics of elsewhere as a kind of ersatz critique. My complicity will not wear the saving drag of critique, I told myself, but here again I deploy my discomfort as material.</u></p> <p>Hannah Black, "Atlantis," in <i>Dark Pool Party</i> (Los Angeles: Dominica, 2016), 67.</p>	<p><i>laissez-faire et laissez-passer</i> does not attempt to resolve the conflicted collision of collectivity with cultural and economic competition. However, working within the limits of this system, we seek a space in the contraction of budgets for generosity and presence. For some of the artists in the exhibition, this becomes a part of the work: playing on the abstracted tenderness of a thin airline blanket; trusting a refrigerator's resistance of entropy—an automated maintenance labor—to the caprice of weather; contending the collective delusion and seduction of military heroism and state power; or invoking the spirits of a collaborative mythology. In other instances, this sociality emerges directly in the labor of painted and polished walls, in the gesture of opening an intimate, creative space to public encounter. The first floor of the exhibition entangles these disparate projects; the second floor offers insight into each artist's broader practice on the walls and sketches a stage of their working process on the horizontal of plywood work tables. By engaging the ties of this coincidental community—the MFA thesis group—the artists in this show lean into the negotiations of collectivity, production, friendship, and care. I hope that what the art world has to give is precisely this soft boundary between network and community, commodity fetish and awe; less object and more address, enabling relation in the way that we practice and organize.</p>
<p><u>Who is the / You of advertising.</u></p> <p><u>I am trying to decide / If the things humans emit / Between themselves / Have any reason.</u></p> <p>Ariana Reines, <i>Coeur de Lion</i>, (Albany, NY: Fence Books, 2014), 49 + 56.</p>	<p><i>laissez-faire et laissez-passer</i> structures itself as a self-conscious strike-out and strike-through—an attempt to erode a compromised structure while ineluctably reproducing it. The exhibition title means to suggest a rejection of our shared role as a medium for social and economic competition, as well as a negation of the literal meaning of the term—the French, "Let go and let pass," itself a translation of the Chinese 無為 or "non-doing." We may exist within this system, but it is not a natural one and there is much that we are trying to undo.</p>

I have begun to take poetic license with the word *metabolize*. I was thinking about how the body takes organic matter (both “good” and “bad”), extracts nutrients from it, and uses it to make other things. The body digests and processes this material in order to propel it onward: in thought, motion, growth, maintenance. So I replace *process* with *metabolize*, applying it to the way artists internalize a world—their own intimate experiences or the larger public field—and digest that input into objects.

After years of speaking with artists, and being heavily invested in critical reflection on materiality, process, and craft (as verb), I had become attuned to the way many (if not most) artists talk about their work. Many of my conversations in studios engage a landscape of ideas rather than a trajectory toward a final practice or object. The artist and I go on a walk through their practice, and as we travel, they point out notable ideas and decisions. Often after these wanderings we find ourselves refreshed—seeing things, both in and outside of their work, differently.

Lately I find myself thinking a lot about the burden “translation”—that is, the written text that might accompany an artwork—places on art: both to be itself and to exceed its own physicality. The act of translating the art object to text seems to take something away from the work, disavowing art’s power to clarify that which cannot be put into words. Language as a continued clarification can start to condition the artwork, and perhaps to put it into service in a way that feels like a circumnavigation of art’s utopian potential. Resolving the art object, and disallowing its form or content to remain just out of reach, makes it far easier to instrumentalize—a thing that the avant-garde, at least, used to intentionally avoid. Art rhetoric appears to metabolize the art object again, as the writer (or curator) extracts nutrients from it to fuel their own argument in a supposed attempt to make further sense.

What if we just sat with the thing? What if we acknowledged that art objects are the new cells, energy, and waste products of a world digested, and *sat with that*? What if we sat with these things and resisted the need to consume them with our power—our words, our dollars, our frameworks? I have been trying to do just that: to pause, with the idea in mind that we are living in a moment when an unprecedented amount of information is coming at us all, as we engage the digital realm for information and entertainment and commerce and connection. In my ongoing attempt to be with art, I have begun to see it as doing a substantial amount of the work of filtering this onslaught of content. Perhaps, then, we can understand artists as editors who clarify the affects of living.

My recent journey through the studios of nine Hunter MFA graduates spurred me to consider the intensity of information and context today, and how that was being processed by this group of distinct makers.

This is a generation of artists whose application of skill and choice of material are wide-ranging—an observation easy to make about the art world in general at this point. Among this generation disciplinarity has been nearly extinguished, and the policing of boundaries and hierarchies between materials and methods has given way to a generous curiosity and embrace of possibility.

The primary thread that connected these artists seemed to be an ease in allowing their practice to serve as a means of metabolizing the world—an unabashed trust in that process that gave them the space to step back and allow it to guide them. Both Judy Koo’s and Hannah Beerman’s paintings manifest this attitude. Koo speaks of her work as revealing how her mind processes and cycles information and experiences throughout a day, and her paintings build up in transparent, washy layers that sandwich together fragments of memories. Beerman’s anarchic paintings likewise amass material, texture, and color in an impassioned processing of life intended to both seduce and repel the viewer. Her surfaces slip and slide, roiling, living things that feel like they might rub off on you—a fugitive coating of affect. Patrick Carlin Mohundro’s sculpture-meets-painting practice is more contained: he scours the hall closet, the medicine cabinet, and the garage to make a kind of tablet that holds the memory of the purpose and origin of his materials. Ajax, cough syrup, ‘breathing’ airplane blankets: the anxieties of maintenance, liminality, and contamination are carried by these objects, which act as dense memos of the affect contained in places just beginning to be mined, let alone understood.

Other artists feel their way toward understanding through the logic of language or the concept of trajectory under evaluation. Jordan Stohl has moved from a sculptural practice, in which nuanced forms populate a sparse inter-object conversation, to enormous wall-based works that recall peeling layers of wallpaper and paint or old linoleum discovered under carpet. These fabricated palimpsests reformulate the sentences or conversations Stohl constructed between his sculptures, condensing them into layers, compressing and muffling time as opposed to airing out and giving space. In a similar, intentional entanglement, Brian Byun renders a puzzle of passageways and cavities using a compositional strategy that treats the canvas stretcher as a too-small container for the atmosphere bubbling up on the painting’s surface. Byun’s dark, foreboding color palette, excited by electric blues and hot pinks, makes for paintings that feel like X-rays of radioactive bodies—revealing the mess inside, whereas Stohl seems to work to obscure it.

Those artists working in the round—Andy Ralph, Emily Janowick, Jessica Mensch, and Elizabeth Harney—infect space with a touch of unease. Ralph’s sculptures function as processing machines, their mechanics unabashedly visible. Ralph speaks about his artmaking as a means to “unwrap everything endlessly,” and his monstrous mosquito nervous system does so by yanking it from the body of the insect. Built as a simple analog synthesizer, this nervous system is set to the perfect

frequency (15 kHz) to repel the bloodsucking insect, creating a soundtrack that bleeds into the room. Janowick creates environments where viewers are inserted into the process, in some cases becoming a necessary material in the work. The textures of an experience—proximities, temperatures, and so on—create an acute awareness in the viewer of how circumstances force a specific frame for understanding. Similarly, Mensch’s stripped-down sets combine the architecture of the theater and the funhouse to act out an amalgamation of dreams and political drama. In making these proposals for alternate realities, Mensch is a kind of midwife for utopic thought, easing viewers into new dimensions through identifiable archetypes that are conjured up like specters. Meanwhile, Harney explores the archetype of the masculine hero as embodied and contorted by the American military. Using leather hide as a substrate for drawing (via leather tooling) as well as a sculptural material for object making, she considers the formation of white American masculinity as both a projection and a shaping (and misshaping) of political fantasy.

Together, this class produces work that finds its footing in a beautiful mess. While there are some clean lines in evidence, the pleasure lies in the artists’ embrace of discomfort as a means toward ease. One senses that they are looking for what can be extracted from this moment, this experience, these times, that can offer some nourishment—and in the absence of that nourishment, how one might grab and repurpose even life’s ugliness in the process of refining one’s toolkit for survival.

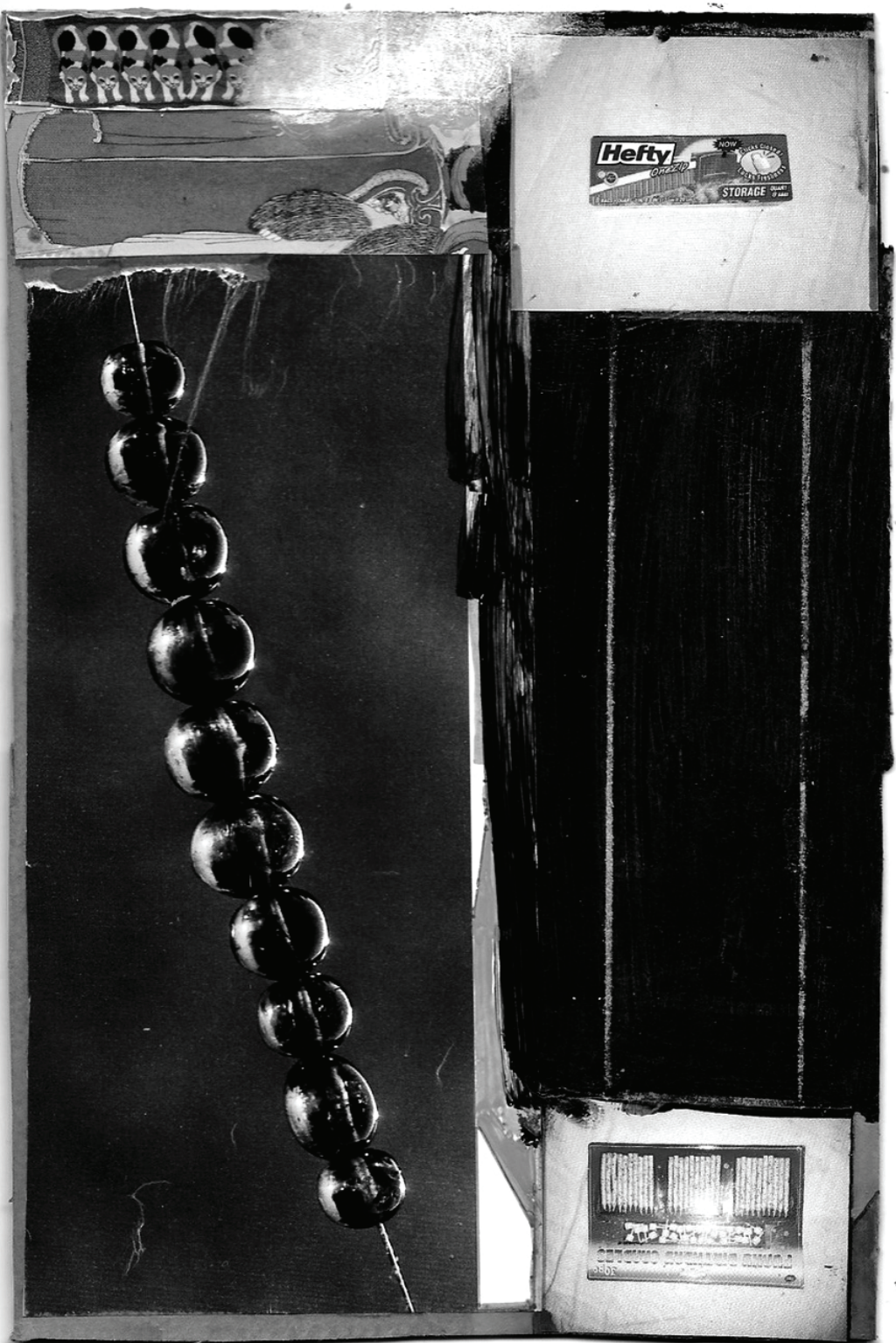
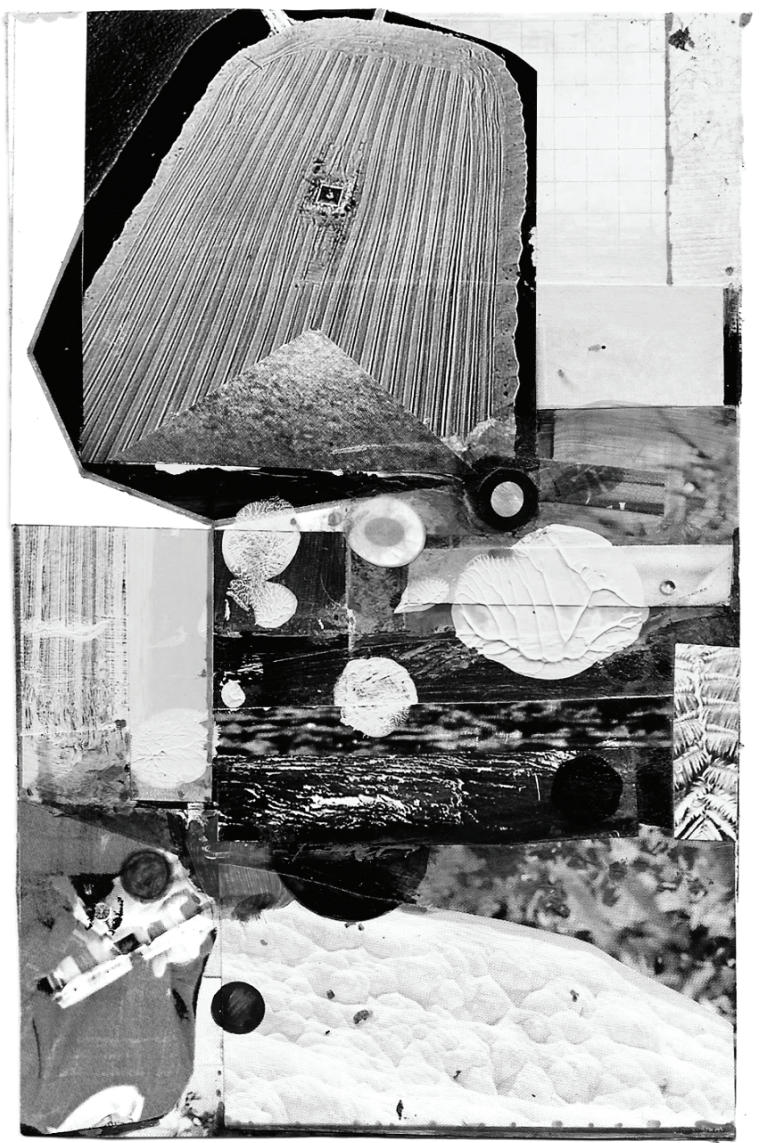
November 2019, New York, NY

Artist Bio:
b.1992 Nyack, NY

What a man, what a man, what a mighty good man
(what a mighty, mighty good man)

Salt-N-Pepa





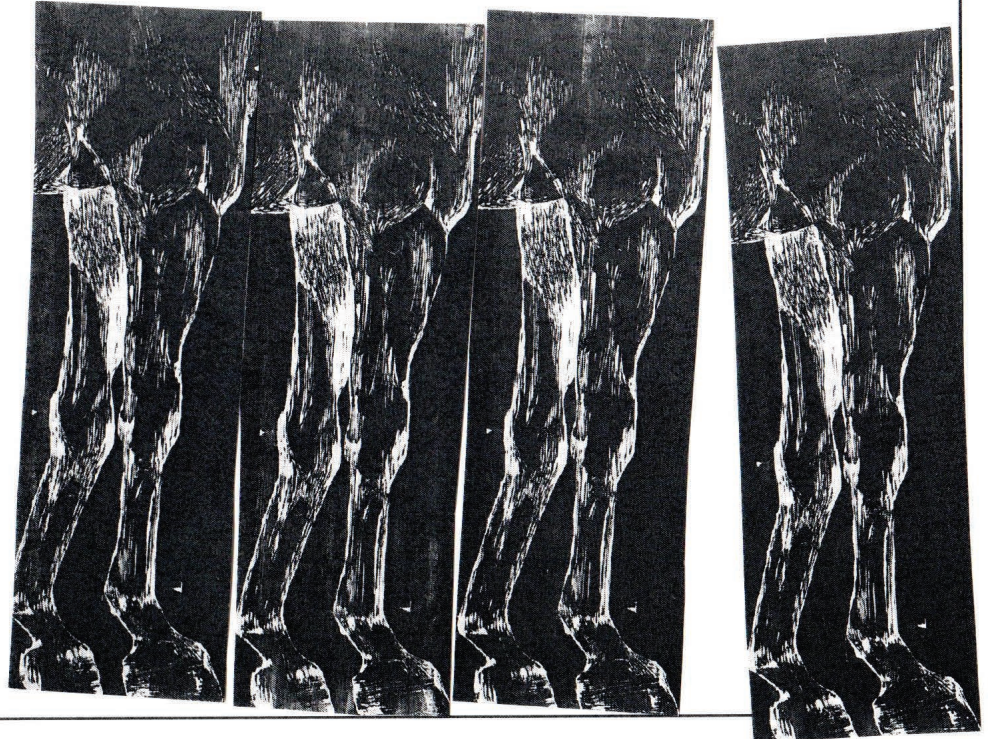
I was a small kid
 Always the shortest in my class
 When I was fifteen my body grew like the Texas midday heat
 It seemed as if overnight I moved into a body that was nothing
 like my own
 Muscles began to bulge with little effort
 And that wasn't the only thing
 The thought of allowing it to grow to its full size terrified me
 I was mostly able to control it
 Whenever it grew to intimidate me I would pray
 When that failed
 I would work my body to exhaustion
 by swimming for miles in the lake
 Trouble began at night
 The monster would manipulate my dreams
 The place where I couldn't resist it
 Always the same dream for years
 It began in different familiar places
 Sometimes I'd be riding one of my horses on the old trail
 Sometimes I'd be alone at the ranch
 I'd feel like something bad was about to happen
 I don't know why but I knew I was in a dangerous place
 Something unknown was hiding
 Waiting for me
 Suddenly it would happen I'd find myself enveloped by a big fleshy body
 I never saw the entire being at once
 The part I remember most were its eyes

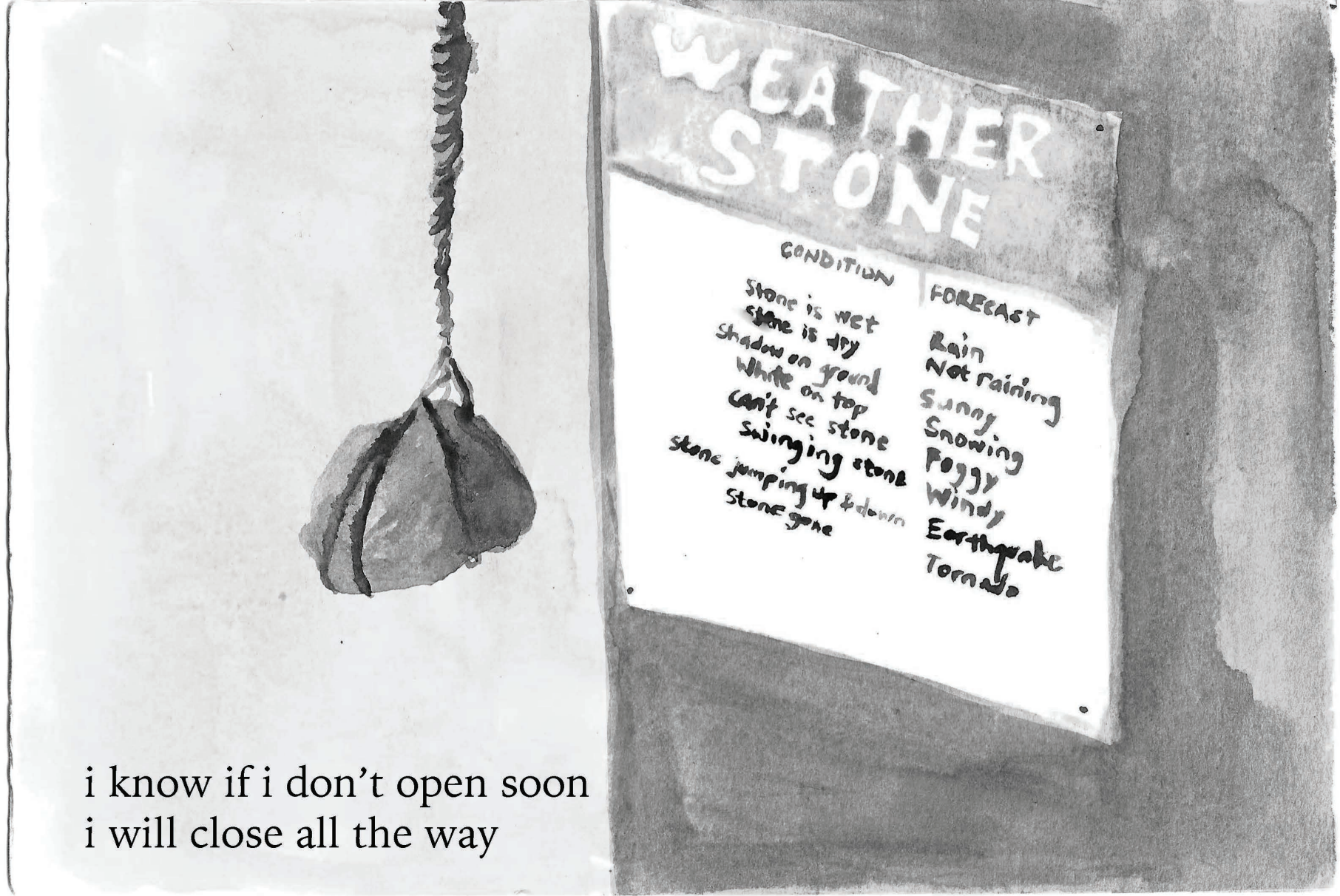
 Dark eyes
 Filled with what felt like love
 Sometimes I could see its chest or its hands
 The thighs or its arms
 They were soft
 Yet thick strong and unyielding

 Every part of my body was held firmly and at times squeezed
 To the point when I thought I might be crushed
 I don't know if this thing was good or evil

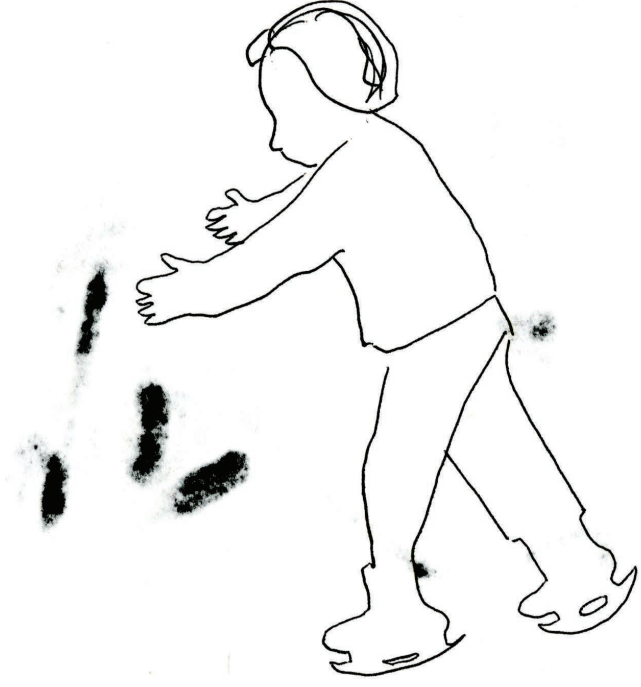
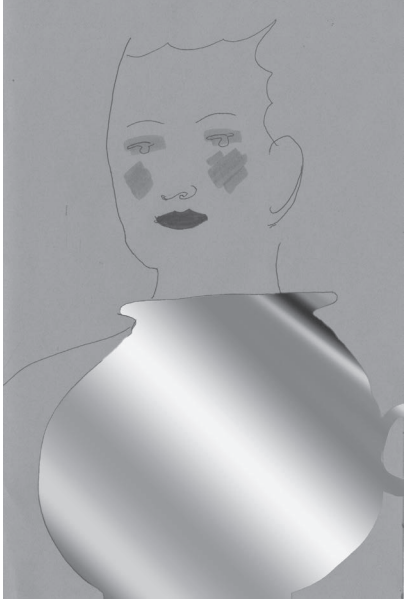
 Sometimes it scared me
 Sometimes I felt relieved
 Safe even

This might sound crazy but I could almost feel
 the thing's body merging with mine
 I couldn't tell where it began and I ended
 I was both myself and something bigger
 I knew that inevitably it would destroy me but
 At that point
 I was so in love with it I didn't care
 I surrendered myself to it
 Giving in made me feel bigger
 In the right way
 I felt a surge of power and control
 Purpose even
 Finally my body would explode
 I'd wake up to find myself wet and sticky between the legs
 The monster was there, sleeping
 Limp
 Humble
 I'm telling you this story now; but the shame I felt then was unbearable
 I would have to punish my body
 Cleanse it with sweat and blood





i know if i don't open soon
i will close all the way



Myth-Making with The Powers // Katherine Kline, Jessica Mensch, Emily Pelstring

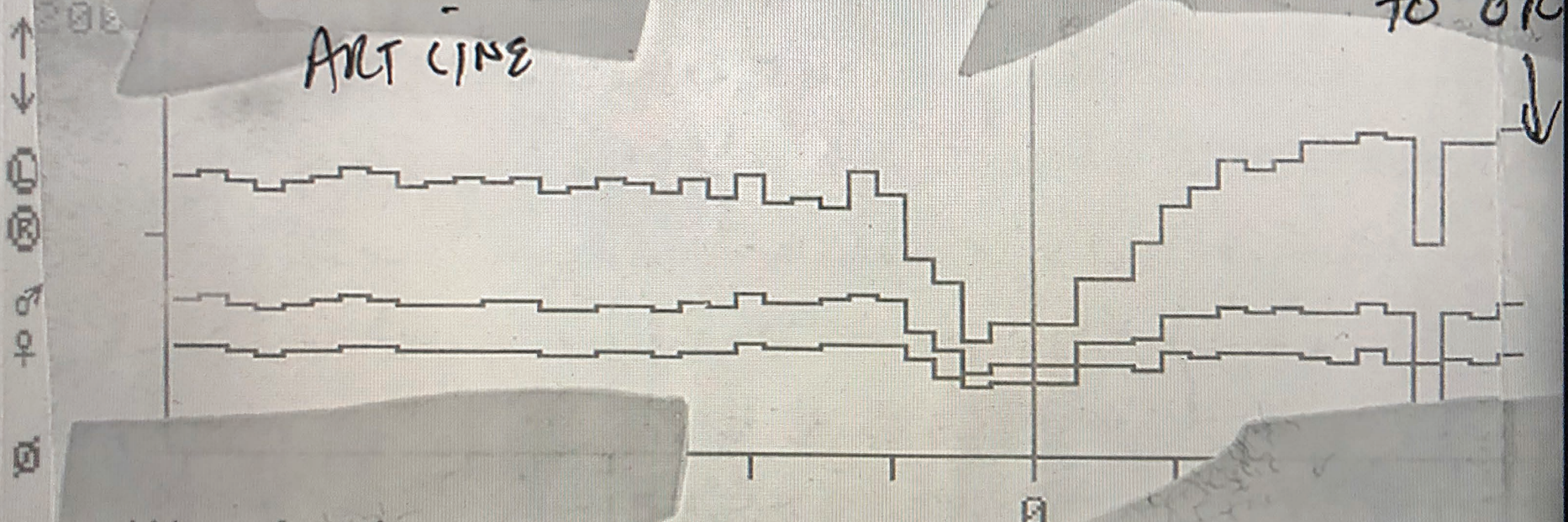
To commit to a process of myth-making is to take imaginative play seriously. This kind of play has its ideological stakes, after all. The heroes of our inherited myths tend to devalue and discipline certain bodies and modes of embodiment, be they femme bodies, hybrid bodies, queer bodies, or immaterial bodies. The Powers call upon a pantheon of their own making in order to disrupt the myths they have inherited, particularly those myths about heroes who, in their drive for conquest, have trouble looking monsters in the eye. The guiding question is: How might we make new myths, ones that reflect our values and experiences, that offer more love and openness than those myths that we have inherited, which, by the time they reach us, are often poisoned by hierarchy, violence, and trauma? How might we reconfigure, warp, or otherwise dismantle familiar stories through a liberal recasting and reinterpretation of archetypes?

The Powers use performative myth-making to animate the Shitty Wizards in our lives, as well as the Medusas, and thereby confront some all-too-repetitive stories. These encounters with invented deities and familiar mythological figures take on a ritualistic tone, which is then undermined by our use of cheap materials, surreal juxtapositions, and physical comedy. Reverence is balanced by negation, ambivalence, and ambiguity. In this campy, playful approach, there is an implicit critique of the self-important sanctity of the power structures that be.



q̄ (each, every)
 DROPPED HIS B/P WHILE I WAS SHOOTING
 c̄ (with)
 COMPLAINED THAT HIS CALVES FELT U
 p̄ (post, after)
 FLIPPED BACK HIS COVERS AND HE WAS
 z̄ (approximately)
 BLOOD LEAKING FROM HIS @ FEM

z̄ (approximately equal to)
 12 (asymptotically equal to)
 IN



∴ (therefore)
 Δ (diagnosis change)
 ΔΔ (different diagnosis)

well out to the left (south) and then
 top of this arete the summit of granite
 Slabs and talus are traversed N.W. to
 of a wall bordered on the left by an
 slings in the area of the wall mark
 chimney struck me as fifth class for
 100ft of third class zig-zagging up
 makeshift register and U.S.G.S. marker
 avoid the fifth class chimney either
 N.E. ridge.

No.1 The Boat and The Compass

He had to trick himself into believing there would be a two-way conversation again. To do this, he needed to construct a boat: a sturdy vessel that would help him investigate a recently carved out basin; a deep bowl that now appeared as a massive lake swirling with sedatives and dangling nerve ends.

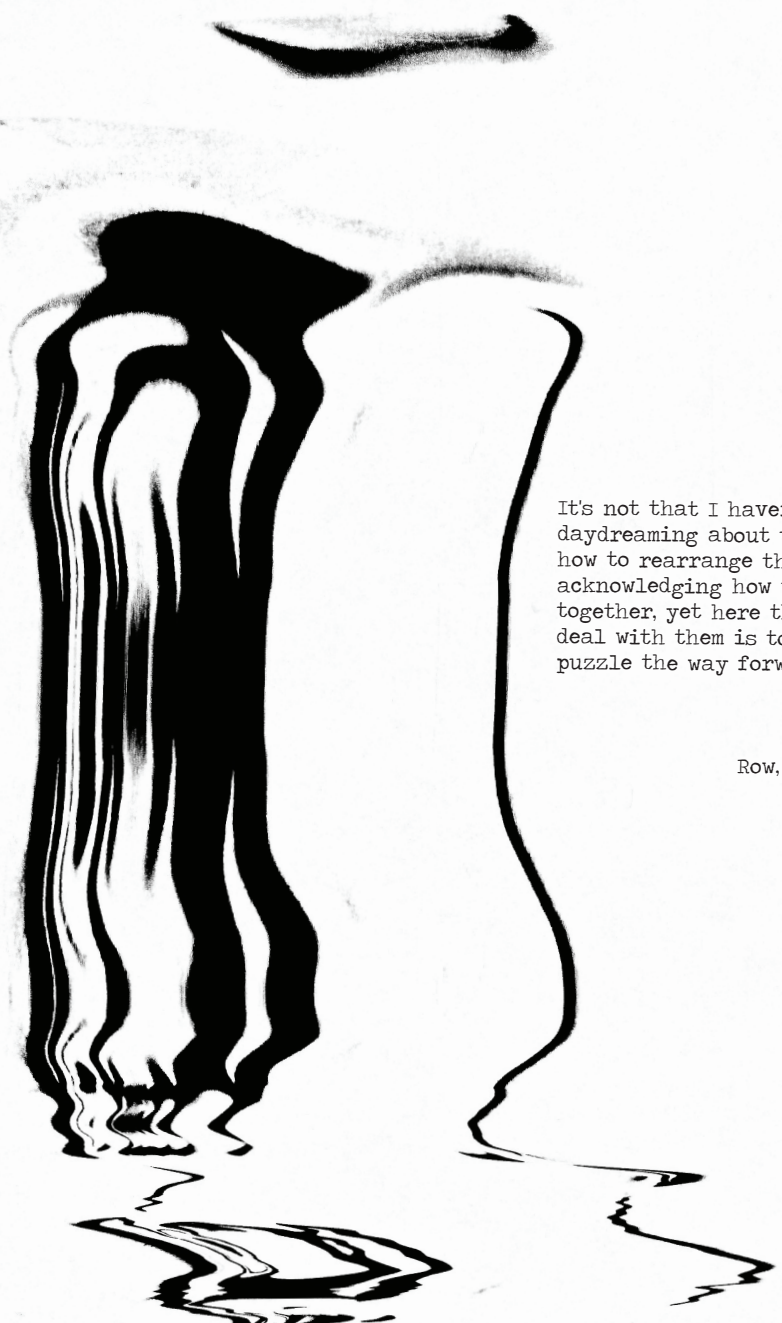
Objective A - Build something that will float. A sustainable vessel that can be refueled by the unknown.
Objective B - Use the vessel to seek impossible solutions.
Objective C - Fuel the vessel with the power of the unknown.

This isn't just a dream I'm having; this is me acknowledging that constantly chasing is what I do best. This is me coming to grips with a wayward self. This is my method of steering around living fragments with the compass of art making, a maneuver that produces more fragments and ultimately, more questions.

In this boat, he can get into the mess of it all and begin to collect the shattered pieces. In this boat, he would be able to chase after the slipping of time and try to hear his brother's voice again. In this boat, he becomes I.

I'm not sleepy. I'm just tired of thinking there might be an answer. But then again, I don't think I want an answer. I cross through the imbalances that make up my experience, the myths of life and death, my metamorphosis from son to father for the second time, and the tragedy of lost cognitive functions my younger brother is currently facing. I cross the imbalances and continue on using art as my compass.

From his boat, he can see that his brother is pieces of things now, things that don't line up, things that don't agree with each other. From his boat, he can survey the surface and begin to catalog the moving and still vital pieces of the other 'him'.



It's not that I haven't slept. I've been dreaming all day, daydreaming about these significant imbalances and how to rearrange them and tip the scales. This is me acknowledging how these imbalances don't feel comfortable together, yet here they are, right in front of me. How I deal with them is to call on even more imbalances and to puzzle the way forward.

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream
If you see a crocodile
Don't forget to scream

author unknown
& me



In both examples, you look ahead or past where you want the ball or paint to go, your *hand* follows. The *location* is what I see, the city's visual noise. I'm *building* a painting not painting it. The *formal* is the set for a location.

The push pull of figure ground is more *excavation* than perception, more house-painter-paintings. Making the static, performative, through association to actual *walls*, living walls with a history. Somewhere in *there*, an intended tone, the physic weight of visual information imposed on us.

NICOLE KAACK is a curator and writer based in Queens, NY. She has organized exhibitions and programs at Small Editions, CRUSH Curatorial, Assembly Room, NURTUREart, the NARS Foundation, and The Kitchen, among other spaces, and is the co-founder of the publication platforms *prompt:* and *not nothing*. Kaack is the Associate Director at A.I.R. Gallery, New York.

SHANNON STRATTON is a Canadian writer and curator based between New York and Chicago. She is currently Executive Director of Ox-Bow School of Art and Artist's Residency.

~~*laissez faire et
laissez passer*~~

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