

# In Practice: Literally means collapse

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SculptureCenter

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# In Practice: Literally means collapse

Camila Palomino

From built environments to systems of circulation, protocol, and belief, infrastructure is in constant generative friction with decay. Guarding against the threat of ultimate ruin, rituals of maintenance are conscientiously designed and performed to sustain complex urban infrastructures, to look after the data that support our networked cities and economies, and to protect our social fabric and personal livelihoods. As urban anthropologist Shannon Mattern writes, because “breakdown is our epistemic and experiential reality,” maintenance must be engaged as a daily habit and corrective framework.<sup>1</sup> She points out while maintenance preserves that which exists, it can also deter the newness and efficiency that are irresistibly seductive within capitalism. Yet, as innovation begets ruin, or at least provokes obsolescence, defunct systems and routines are often blindly repeated. Maintenance and entropy affirm each other.

To maintain, then, is a spiraling choreography of contradictions. At the top of a Customer Safety Instruction manual for an Amtrak sleeper room is the message “We’re All in This Together...Literally!” Intended perhaps as an uplifting prompt to collective care in a confined and shared space, the call also feels like self-reflexive acknowledgment of the longstanding decline of Amtrak and the US passenger railroad industry, and the choice to move at the pace of an aging monopoly. The question is less whether things are always falling apart and more how much we choose to actively identify and reckon with that process. Untangling the role of ruins within a contemporary moment, artist and theorist Svetlana Boym writes that “‘ruin’ literally means ‘collapse’—but actually, ruins are more about remainders and reminders.”<sup>2</sup> She elaborates that as sites, ruins trigger both potential nostalgias (for a past that could have been) and imagined futures (that never came to pass). Ruins open up a game of projection, a hall of mirrored temporalities. They can serve as tangible reminders of a persistent state of precarity and what remains through the promiscuity of order. *In Practice: Literally means collapse* is situated in the idea that we exist among spaces of nonlinearity—of histories and timescales collapsed.

If we take collapse as direction, and ruin as result, ambivalence can establish the rhythm at which order is unmade. Moving toward conflict and ambiguity is the strategy of many of the projects in this exhibition—a movement toward the contradictions that erosion reveals. Artist Alan Martín Segal reminds us of this in two scenes from his video installation *Incomplete Disappearances*. Between the washed-out facades of Buenos Aires, the text narrates the parable of two adjacent clocks in the city. The first is a clock that was owned by a local furniture store, which moved at a standard pace. The other was a municipal clock with a faulty barrel: sometimes a second actually lasted 0.999 seconds, sometimes 1.111 seconds. The asynchronicity of these timekeepers constituted a threat to the managerial logic of the city, which responded by taxing and eventually shuttering the first clock. Yet, the malfunctioning clock was not alone in its aberrant rhythm. In an earlier sequence of the film, a third clock, belonging to the city council, was also known to indicate a “time out of time.” Though very slight deviances cannot be felt, imagine the disruption to reputation, let alone to the patina of order. In an effort to subsume this municipal hiccup, the mayor named the council’s clock the Local Time Regulator. Perhaps an accelerant to collapse is the interchangeability of value or function—the arbitrary sweep of the second hand against the routine, the standardized, and the bureaucratic. Ambivalence can be maintained, too.

Between the desire for destruction and the certitude of failure, *In Practice: Literally means collapse* examines polysemic unmaking through material and metaphor. Some artists examine the failures of cities and other containers of information, working with and against the anxiety of maintenance and deterioration. Some unravel monoliths through minute observation of mundane accumulations and the debris of daily exchange—following the “ethics of found objects, small,” to borrow a phrase from Renata Adler.<sup>3</sup> Some invoke a strategic disintegration and flattening of symbols and aesthetics: collapse involves the removal of distance between things, a gesture that allows cousins in contradiction to sit together. Still other artists embrace the breaking-down of space, time, language, and additional familiar logics. *In Practice: Literally means collapse* collects these overlapping studies in the paradoxical timescale of ruin.

**Marco Barrera** uses waterways as a subjective cursor with which to trace the industrialization and development of New York City. Along a narrow hallway is a selection of heavy metal doors that once secured safes within small businesses, warehouses, and homes in the Northeastern United States. Produced in the Rust Belt at the turn of the twentieth century, their interior surfaces are decorated with paintings of flowing waters by anonymous artists. Meandering streams and picturesque sailboats accompanied reserves of cash that had been sequestered from circulation.

At the end of the hallway, Barrera has installed a collection of bottled water samples on a steel shelf that visitors can sort through. The source of each sample is related to a different aspect in the development of New York City, from a faucet at Empire City Casino in Yonkers to runoff from a quarry in Vermont that provides marble used for the ornamentation of municipal buildings in Lower Manhattan. An accompanying book made by the artist indexes the samples and sites with diaristic and historical notes. The publication includes an essay by the Canal Street Research Association that traces the distribution of wealth in New York City through the seemingly infinite circulation paths of currency and plumbing. Taken together, Barrera's two installations shape a dislocated cartography of the urbanization of the city.

**Allen Hung-Lun Chen** has hand-carved an architectural detail from a Taiwanese temple for this meditation on the rituals of maintaining structures and tradition. The swallowtail-shaped roof ornament, referring to eaves found on temples in Taiwan and throughout East Asia, is made of black walnut, a wood indigenous to the United States, where Chen is currently based. The eave sits on an aluminum-cast replica of a folding table, a support commonly used in East Asia to make offerings, such as fruits and flowers, to spirits throughout the day. Through this offering of the eave, Chen gives some permanence to a traditionally transient quotidian practice. Situated on the ground floor, the installation is intended to provide a protective force within the confines of SculptureCenter.

**Violet Dennison** uses a knot system to encode poems and writing in colorful large-scale installations she weaves from pneumatic tubing. Like a sigil, each knot in the black tubing holds an embedded message and prayer. The interlacing of the twists is guided by a computer program, developed by Dennison and an engineer, that encrypts text by translating it into a binary language that instructs on whether to pass a tube over or under. Produced through a series of repeated actions, the knots' unique shapes hold information. Another layer of repetition creates patterns with these knots, further distancing access to the coded information. The title, *Maniac Double*, is a reference to DanceDanceRevolution, a music video game that similarly directs action through visual code. Dennison is interested in the optimization of communication between individuals and technologies, but also in the exhaustion of legibility and symbolic power through flattened and ornamental forms.

**Enrique Garcia** uses photography and bricolage to examine public plazas in Mexico, making visible the legacies of colonial design while collecting moments of daily movement and deterioration. In this series, Garcia mounts images he has made at select locations: La Antigua in Veracruz, an early failed Spanish settlement where a house allegedly belonging to Hernán Cortés still stands, overgrown with roots and vines; Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, where a sixteenth-century Catholic bishop designed the plaza and new master plan for the city; and the Zócalo in Mexico City, where the Spanish built over a ceremonial space of the Aztec. Each location is documented at a macro level through photography as a conduit to urban life, and on a pedestrian level through the incorporation of residual objects found in situ. The ambiguous objects, from earrings to rusted pipes and other worn metals, bear the traces of unknown individuals and routines. In each framed work, Garcia reveals the asynchronous layers of history in public spaces.

**Ignacio Gatica** uses a collection of political souvenir wristwatches to narrate the legacy of US intervention and neoliberalism in Latin America. In 2019, the United States sent Argentina a batch of CIA files in what was at the time the largest government-to-government transfer of declassified documentation. Excerpts from the archives, elaborated by Gatica's research and writing, were printed on concrete plinths with a mechanical handwriting machine. Resting on top, at wrist level, are watches Gatica acquired from various states and organizations throughout the Americas. Each ticking timepiece has been modified by the artist to endlessly mark the moment of an event chronicled in the CIA documents. On the wall is a poem borrowed from the Chilean poet Carlos Soto Román that is loosely based on the biography of a particular CIA agent. The total accumulation of towered watches and texts represent a network of overlapping political and social histories and suggest the monolithic, mechanistic nature of the US's global interventions.

**Cherisse Gray** has assembled a site-responsive installation that reroutes conventions of architecture and ornament. Distilling symbols of bureaucratic tradition, she reconfigures them to implicitly contrast hostile and accommodating design. The built environment Gray has constructed implies the absence of its inhabitants. A miniature spiral steel staircase leads into a structure made of drop ceiling tile, within which red lights glow and an oscillating fan ruffles a poinsettia—traces of cheap, standardized building materials are refashioned into a droning home for a mouse. Near this element is the full-scale imitation of a bench from a brutalist building in the Philippines commissioned by the Marcos regime. The artist has transformed this awkward and antisocial piece of furniture into a heated seat for visitors to enjoy. On the floor, a carpeted red stage supports an organically shaped lamp sculpted by the artist. The final element is a ceiling fixture that casts diffused light from above to join the independent elements into one spatialized encounter. The myth of universal utility in objects and systems breaks down in Gray's installation.

**Jessica Kairé's** *Folding monument (Christopher Columbus Statue, Columbus Triangle, Queens, New York)* emerges from an ongoing practice in which she translates historic monuments into soft sculptures mobilized by viewers to become allegories for the construction of history in public space. In previous related works, Kairé created fabric replicas of monuments that commemorate contentious moments and political figures in Guatemala. For this iteration, she interprets the vandalized pedestal that supports a statue of Christopher Columbus in Astoria, Queens—one of the five Columbus statues distributed among New York's boroughs. Installed in a collapsed state, the sculpture is revived by being pulled up by attached ties, which visitors are invited to do collaboratively. In inviting this collective act, Kairé gestures to the participation required to challenge shared histories.

**Fred Schmidt-Arenales's** latest film, *Committee of Six*, is premised on the reenactment of a series of closed-door meetings between university officials and community organizers in 1955 at the University of Chicago. Archived minutes of the meetings reveal plans and strategies for displacing Black communities and limiting racial integration. Departing from the historical minutes as a script, the film follows the group of six performers as they play the historical participants. The actors' interpretations of the original exchanges are interlaced with their off-script and off-set reflections on present-day policies and ideologies. Overlaps and continuities between past and present emerge through the relational dynamics between actors serving as a proxy for those of the original meeting members. Through the complex activation of historical evidence, the film points to the cyclical nature and consequence of discriminatory urban renewal.

**Alan Martín Segal**'s video and audio installation *Incomplete Disappearances* meditates on the physical and social infrastructures of Buenos Aires. The work draws on a series of texts, including the artist's personal correspondence as well as a short story by Ezequiel Martínez Estrada titled "La cabeza de Goliath," a microscopic analysis of social norms and practices in the Argentinian capital. Segal combines nondescript shots of the city with repetitive reenactments of mundane gestures that begin to verge on the uncanny. This accumulation of small gestures and interactions is viewed through a suspended sheet of glass that imposes an oblique distance from which to contemplate the haunting presence of colonial fantasies and ideologies embedded in urban routine.

**Stella Zhong**'s three site-specific structures at the entry to SculptureCenter's arched corridor contain speculative landscapes informed by playful interpretations of scale. Tucked under and over the smooth planes of each maquette are populations of diversely shaped miniature units that sprawl into unseen corners. Similar to game pieces, they are engineered to perform precise and unexpected roles. Glimpses of these objects and their activities surface throughout the installation. A single filament stretches diagonally, connecting two of the structures. Under the reflective plane of a third, entities in the familiar forms of pebbles and chips unite in mitochondrial patterns, building a tight system of entropy through tensile conduits. The units and the structures that contain them suggest a planetary organization, yet they resist conventions of gravity or time, existing as dimensions untethered from conventional logic.

**Monsieur Zohore**'s immersive installation draws parallels between Catholic traditions and the contemporary ethos of late capitalism. Zohore is inspired by an ancient and extant ceremony performed yearly at the Pantheon in Rome in celebration of the Pentecost: roses are released from the building's oculus to symbolize the descent of the Holy Spirit. Zohore translocates this sensorial pageant to the venue of a manufactured money-blowing machine—a fated encounter between two public spectacles. The machine sits within its own excess, littered with a skirt of rose petals and cash. When it is entered and activated, a swirl of money and petals is accompanied by Zohore's voice seductively reciting Baptismal promises against a catchy string of sound. The track played within the machine is a hauntingly playful electronic interpretation of the twelfth-century chant "Veni Creator Spiritus," set to a musical score by composer Joshua Coyne. Embracing "the glamor of evil," *MZ.21 (Pentecost)* embodies the gamification of liturgy, exploring the institutional control that is conditioned by rituals of worship, as well as the entwined relationship between the machinations of Catholicism and capitalism.

My thanks to Kyle Danciewicz and Sohrab Mohebbi for their guidance, to Chris Aque, Kiersten Lukason, and the entire installation team for their support, to Lucy Flint and Natasha Matteson for their editorial precision, and to all the artists for their generosity in collaboration.

- 1 Shannon Mattern, "Maintenance and Care: Fixing a Broken World," *Places Journal*, November 1, 2018, <https://placesjournal.org/article/maintenance-and-care/?cn-reloaded=1>.
- 2 Svetlana Boym, "Ruinophilia," in *The Off-Modern* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 43.

- 3 Renata Adler, *Speedboat* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 35.

# In Practice: Literally means collapse

Marco Barrera, Allen Hung-Lun Chen, Violet Dennison,  
Enrique Garcia, Ignacio Gatica, Cherisse Gray, Jessica Kaire,  
Fred Schmidt-Arenales, Alan Martin Segal, Stella Zhong, and  
Monsieur Zobore

*In Practice: Literally means collapse* is an exhibition of new works and artistic meditations that consider an expanded notion of the ruin that includes social tradition as much as physical infrastructure. From built environments and structures of circulation to protocols and belief systems that shape social and political subjects, infrastructures are in a constant generative friction with decay. Rituals of maintenance are designed and performed to prevent what is constructed from being subjectively ruined.

Diagnosing a contemporary obsession with ruins, artist and theorist Svetlana Boym writes, "Ruin literally means 'collapse'—but actually, ruins are never about remainders and reminders." Boym elaborates that as sites, they can trigger both potential nostalgias and imagined futures. Existing among ruins is existing among spaces of asynchronous time—of histories and timescales collapsed.

The artists in the exhibition trace collapse through material and metaphor. Some artists in the exhibition examine the failures of cities and other containers of information, working with and against the anxieties of deterioration. Some remind us of the strategic disintegration and flattening of symbols and aesthetics. Others embrace the breaking down of space, time, language, and other familiar logics. *In Practice: Literally means collapse* is a series of overlapping studies into timescales of ruin and what doesn't yet remain.

Download the full gallery guide here: 

*In Practice: Literally means collapse* is curated by  
Carolina Paganoni, 2022. In Practice Curatorial Fellow.

SculptureCenter's In Practice open call program supports  
emerging artists and curators by creating new work for  
exhibition at SculptureCenter.

Major support for the In Practice program is provided by the  
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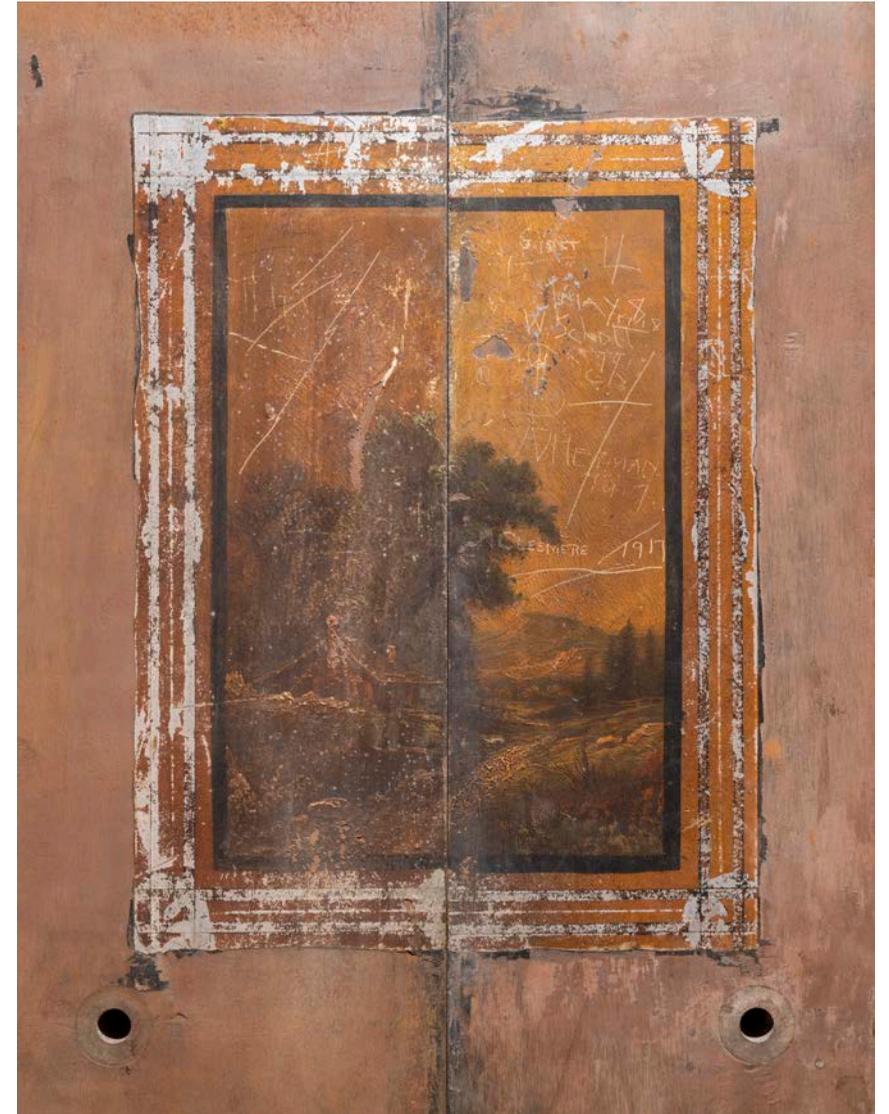
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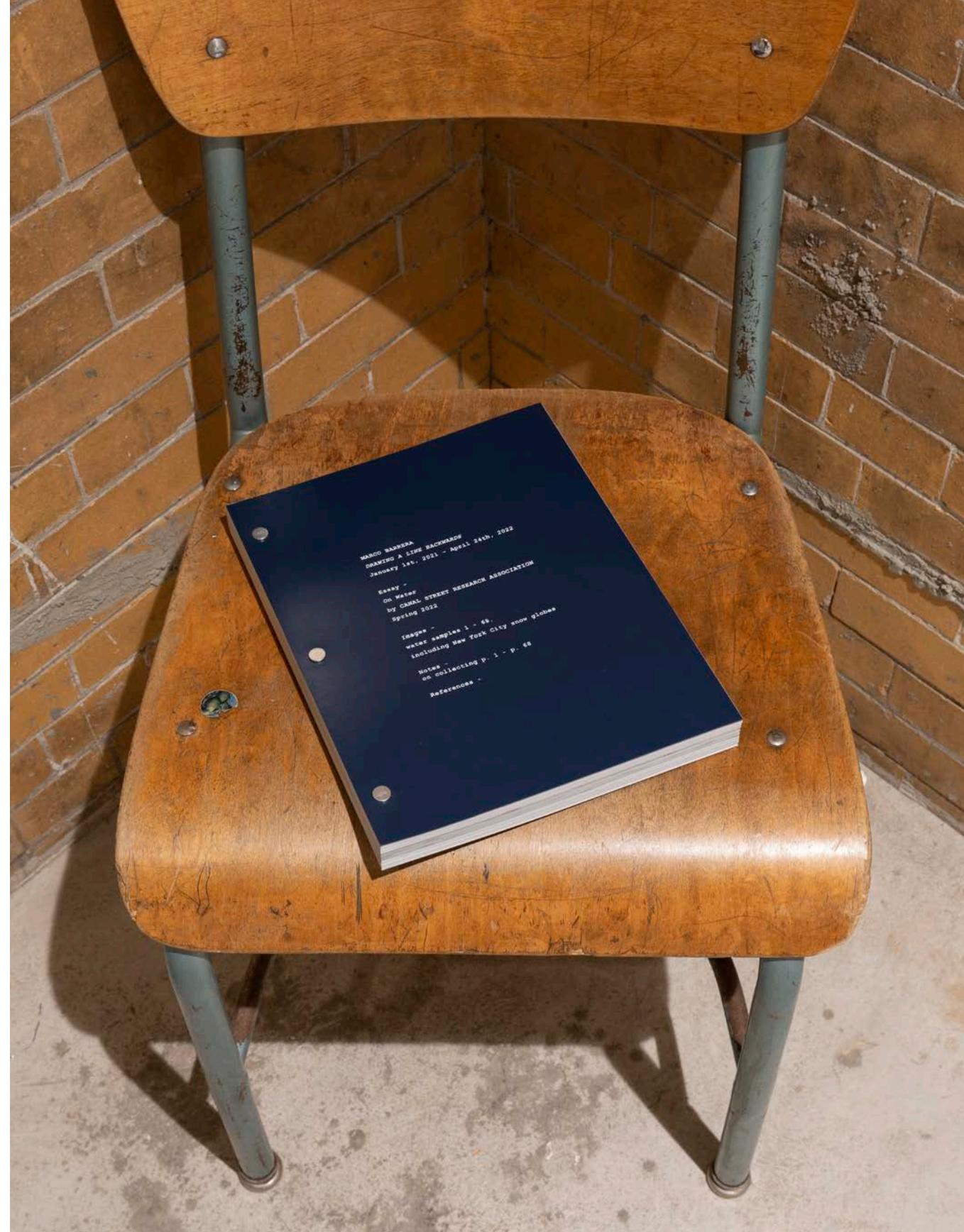


Monsieur Zohore in collaboration with Joshua Coyne











Installation view



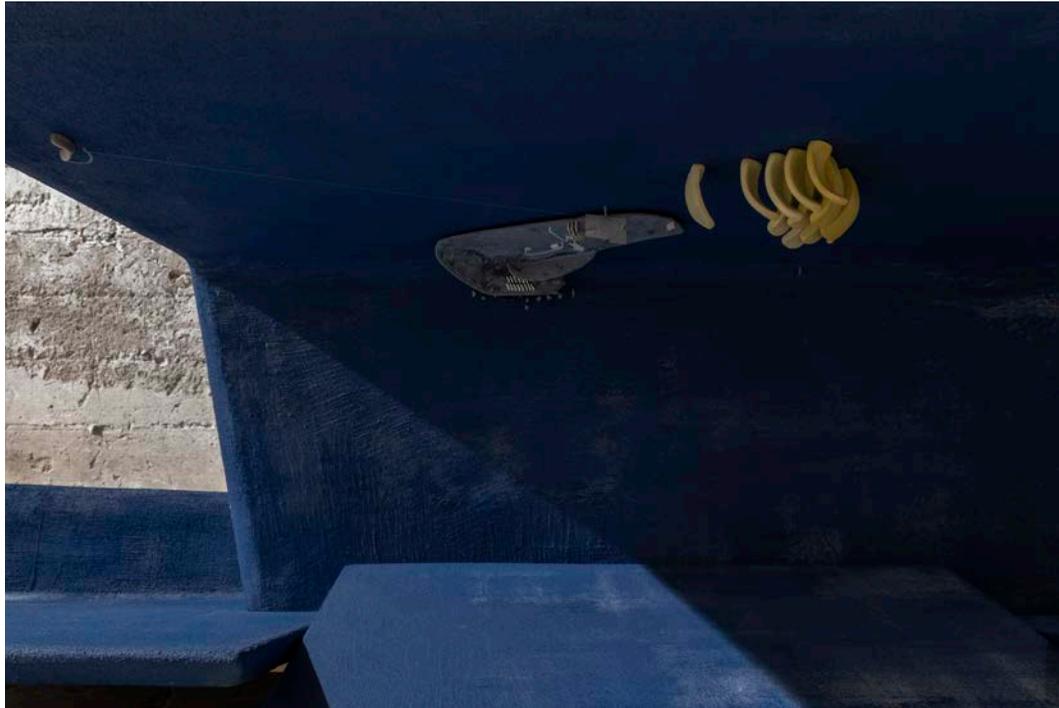
Violet Dennison

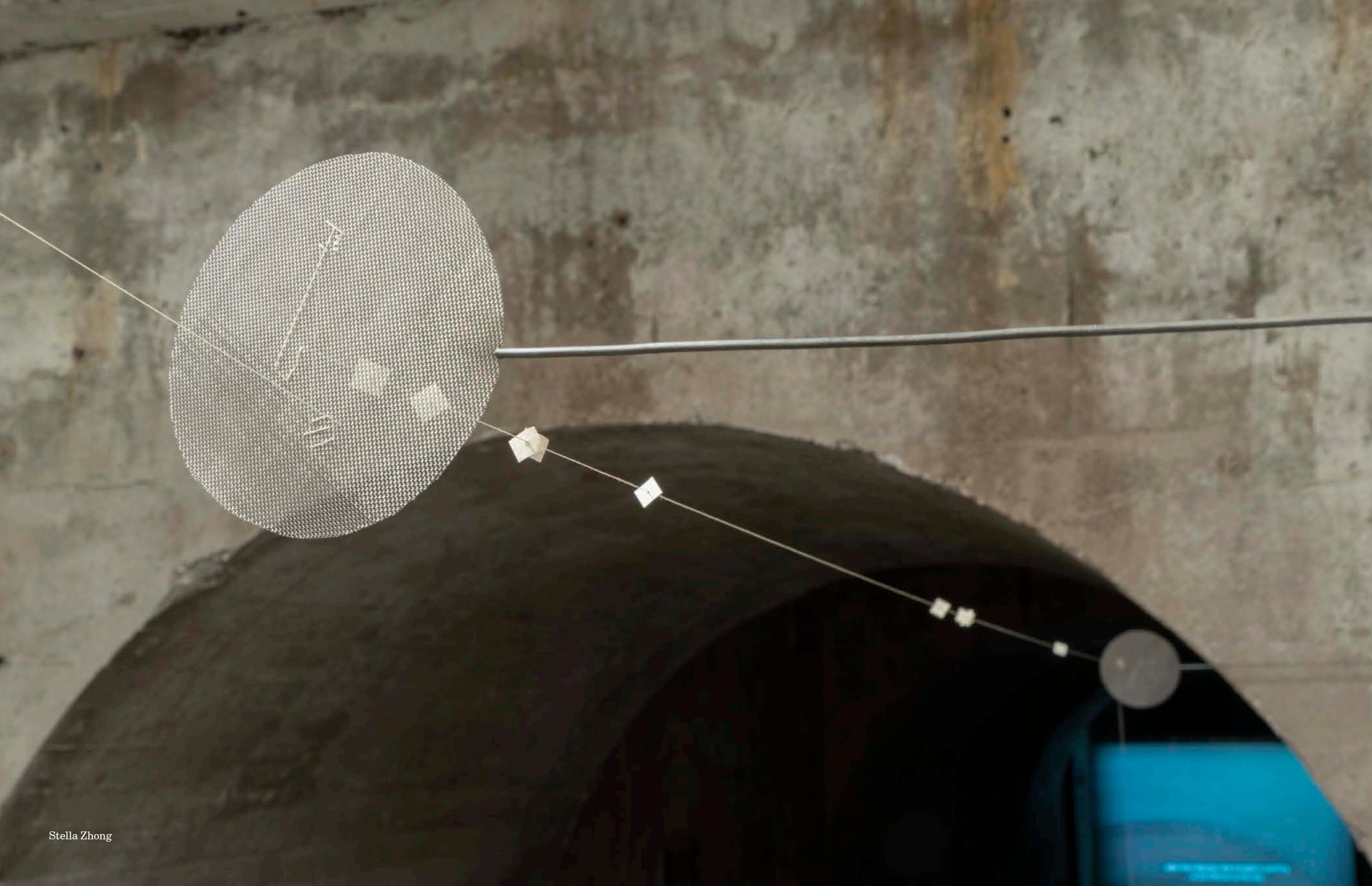


Installation view

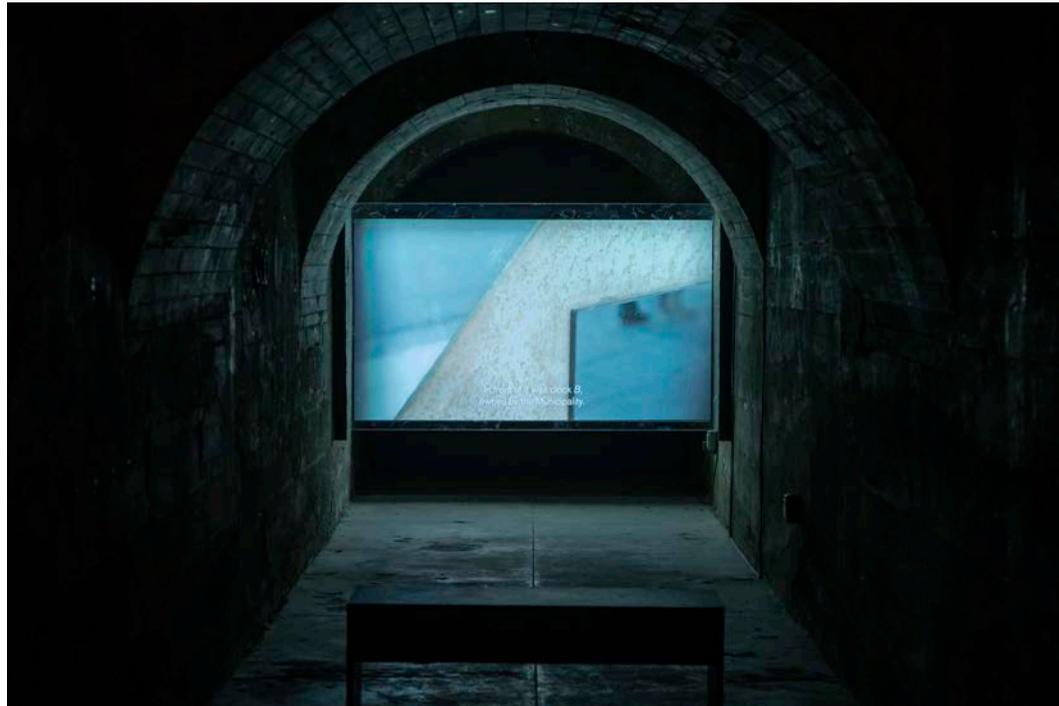


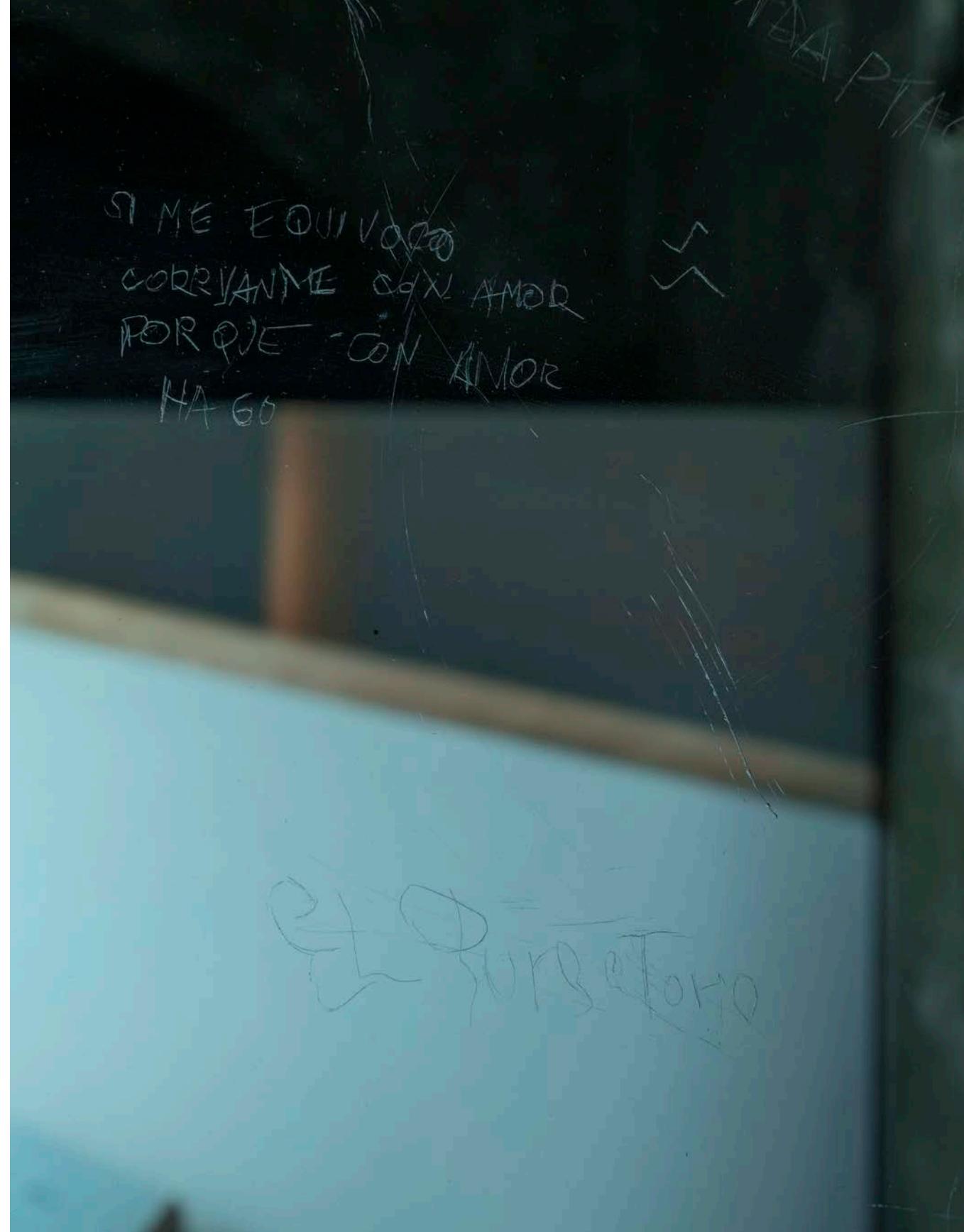
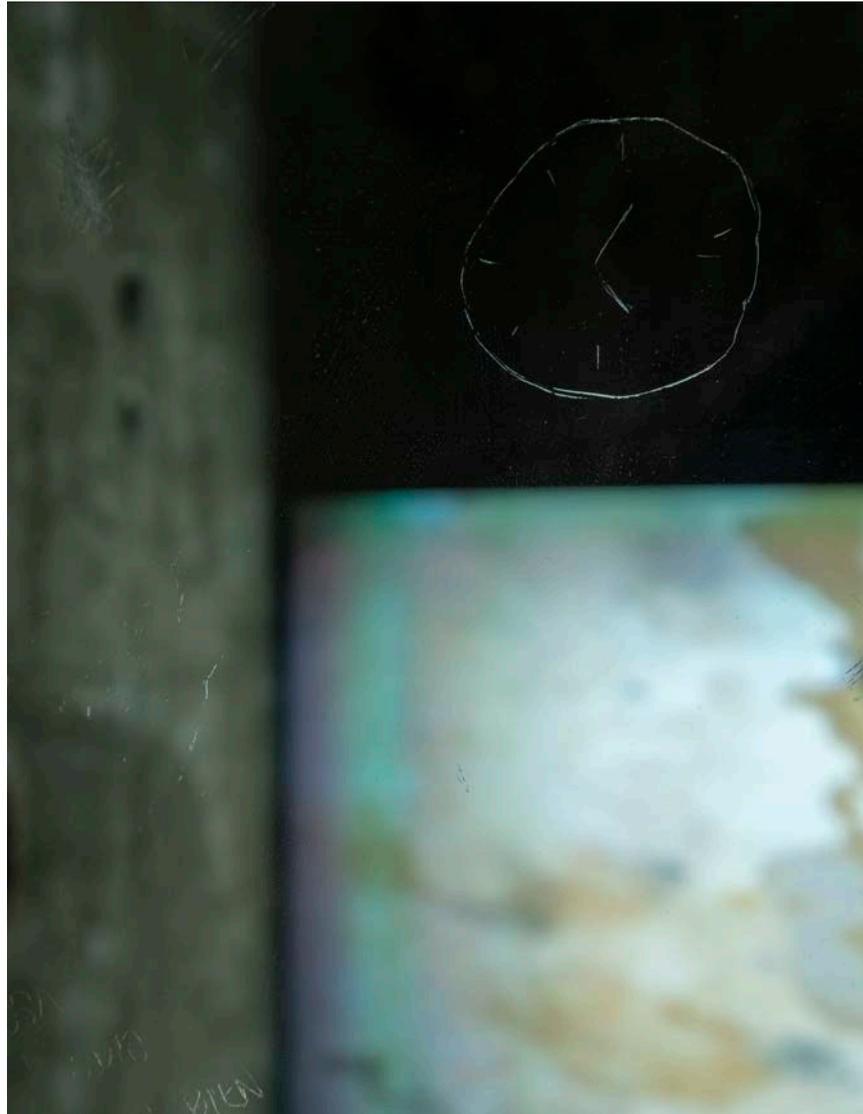
Stella Zhong





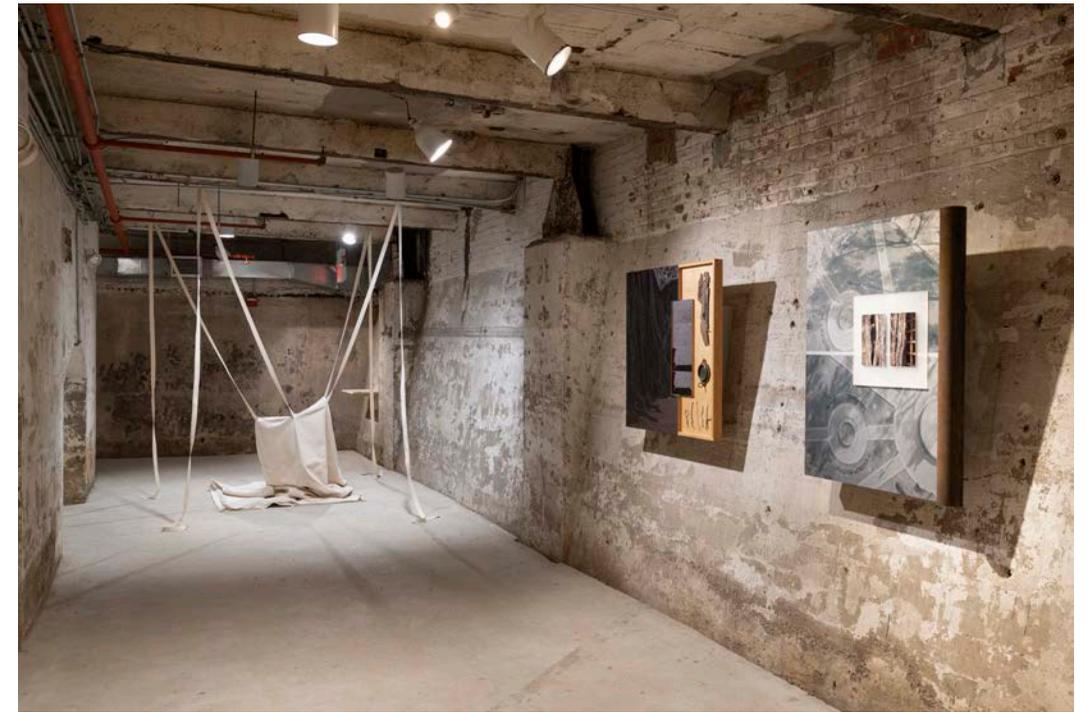












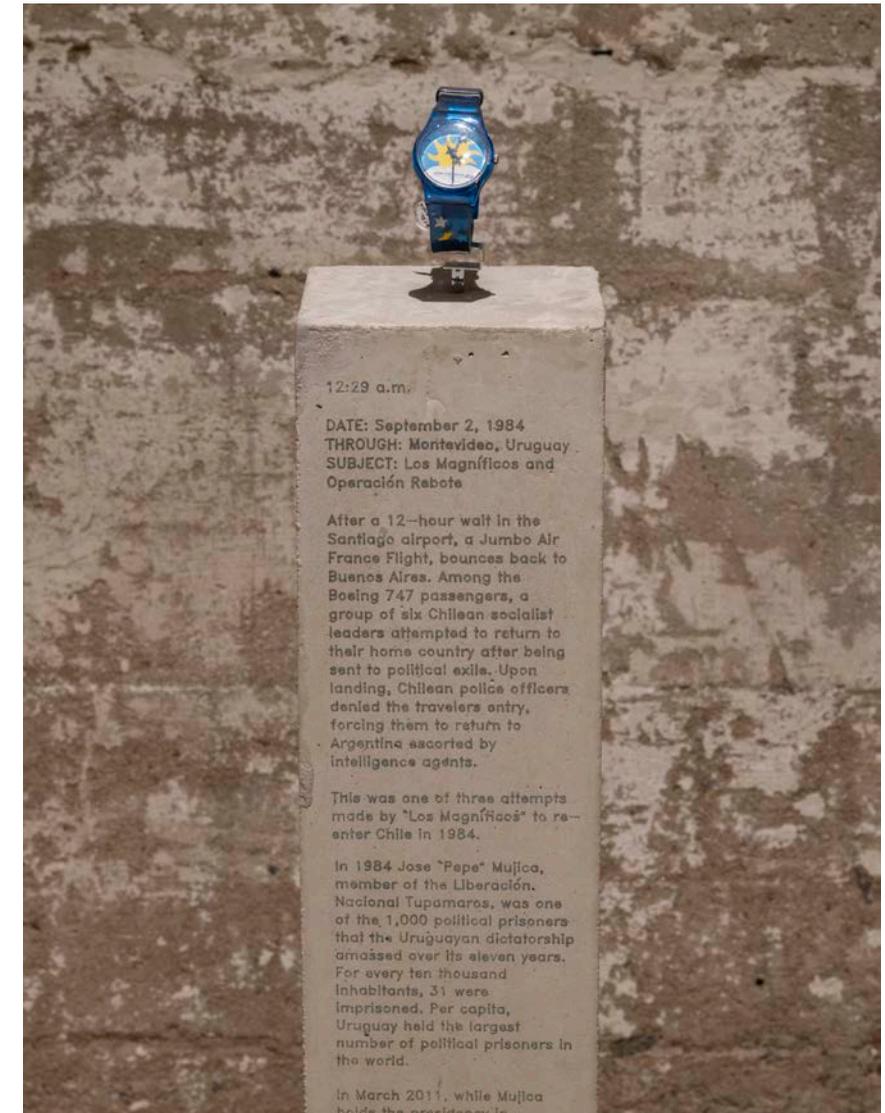
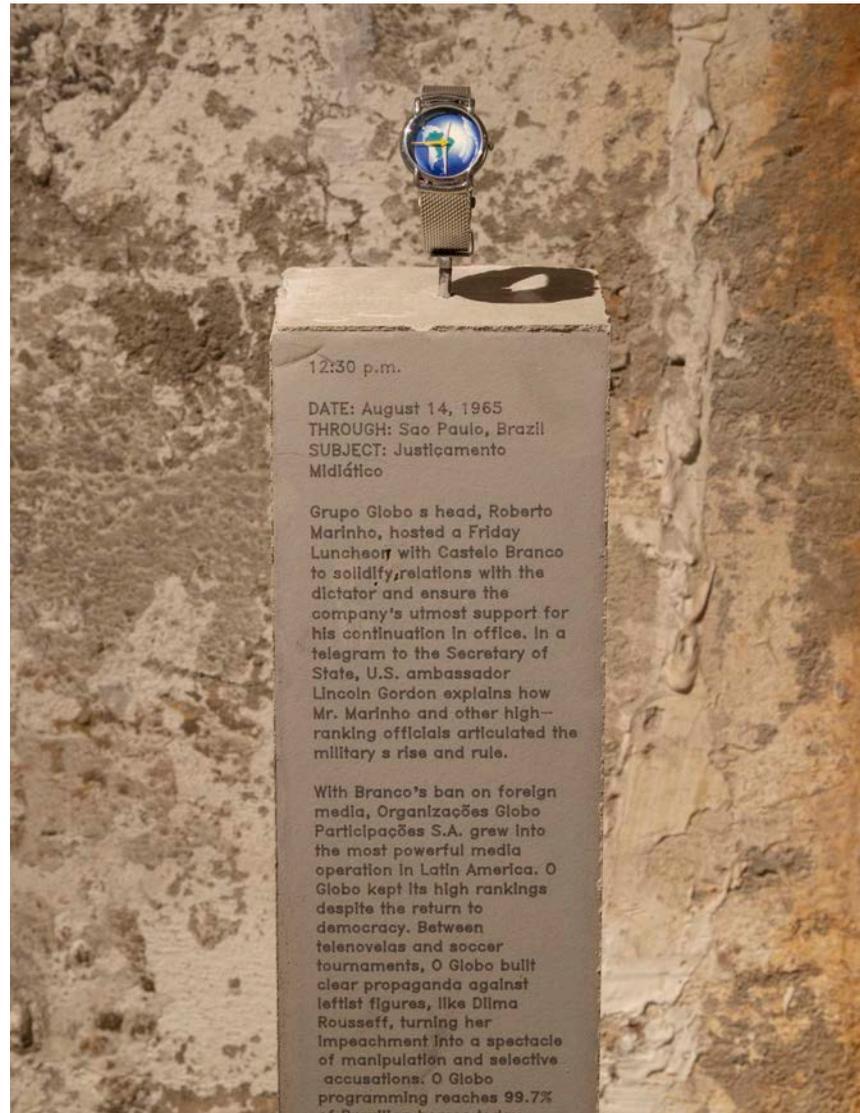


Enrique Garcia





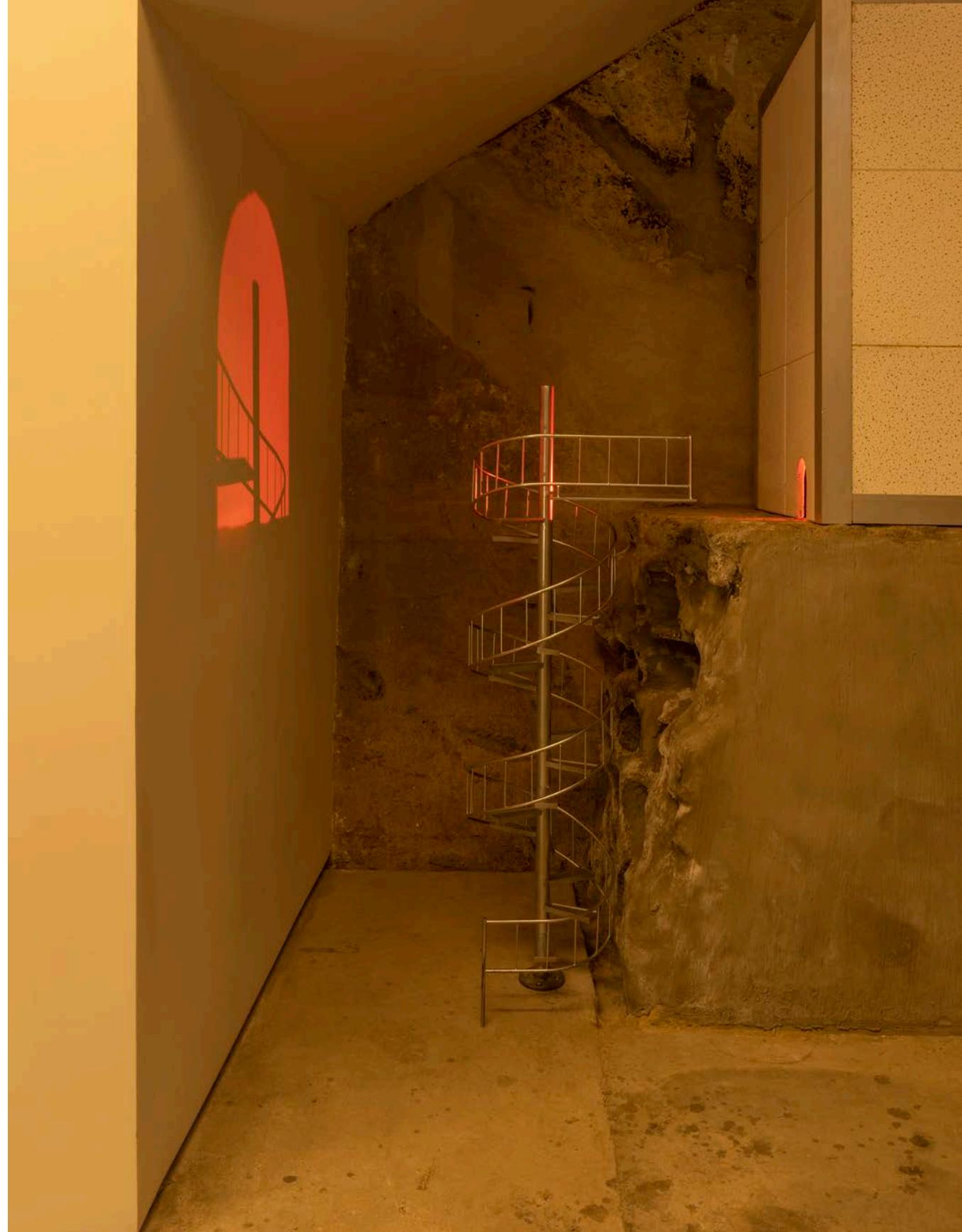
Installation view





Installation view







## Checklist

### Marco Barrera

*Drawing a line backwards*, 2022

(Partial archive of New York City water)

Glass jars, steel Tri-Boro Shelving unit, book

Dimensions variable

*Drawing a line backwards* is edited by and includes an essay by Canal Street Research Association.

*Reservoirs*, 2022

*Untitled (Another house with inscriptions.*

*N. Ciesmere, Herman, W. Schott, G. Yost...*)

Steel safe door, gold leaf, oil paint, varnish

56 × 37 × 9 inches (142 × 94 × 23 cm)

*Untitled (Fishing)*

Steel safe door, gold leaf, oil paint, varnish

18 × 15 ½ × 8 inches (45.7 × 39.4 × 20.3 cm)

*Untitled (Tree on River Bank)*

Steel safe door, gold leaf, oil paint, varnish

19 × 15 × 6 inches (48.3 × 38.1 × 15.2 cm)

*Untitled (Two Cows Drinking Water)*

Steel safe door, gold leaf, oil paint, varnish

17 ½ × 14 × 8 inches (44.5 × 35.6 × 20.3 cm)

### Allen Hung-Lun Chen

*Offering IV (an eave for SculptureCenter)*, 2022

Black walnut, cast aluminum, leather,

ratchet-straps

60 × 72 × 36 inches (152 × 184 × 91 cm)

### Violet Dennison

*Maniac Double*, 2022

Polyurethane tubing, aluminum, vinyl,

copper and steel hardware, rhinestones,

urethane with pigment

74 × 105 inches (188 × 267 cm)

### Enrique Garcia

*Navel (Zócalo)*, 2022

Dye-sublimation prints on aluminum, metal

parts, earring, wire, cedar frame

36 × 38 inches (91.4 × 96.5 cm)

*Radiance (Vasco de Quiroga)*, 2022

Dye-sublimation prints on aluminum, acrylic,

metal pipe, ebonized oak frame

41 ¼ × 34 inches (105 × 86.4 cm)

This project was supported, in part, by a Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant.

### Ignacio Gatica

*Terce*, 2022

Cement, collected watches, metallic holders,

CNC printed text

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Galeria Patricia Ready,

Santiago, Chile

Text research and transcription by Cristalina Parra. Poem by Carlos Soto Roman.

### Cherisse Gray

*Locum Tenens*, 2022

Mouse house, actor and stage, diffusion frame,

heated bench

*3 Proofs of Residency*, 2022

Drop ceiling tile, aluminum angle, predator

flashlight, LED light, red tape, steel spiral

staircase, electric fan, landscaping fabric

36 × 72 × 24 inches (91.4 × 183 × 61 cm)

*Temperate disagreement*, 2022

Plywood, rabbit guard, mortar, light bulbs

23 ½ × 55 × 24 inches (59.7 × 140 × 61 cm)

*understudy centre-stage*, 2021–22

Papier-mâché, wire, Magic Sculpt, drain

tray, wool carpet, drywall, steel tape

32 × 94 × 21 inches (81.3 × 239 × 53.3 cm)

*warmest regards*, 2022

Immaterial

Dimensions relative

### Jessica Kairé

*Folding monument (Christopher Columbus Statue, Columbus Triangle, Queens, New York)*, 2022

Upcycled cotton canvas, thread,

cotton webbing, metal sliders,

plywood shelf, photograph

105 × 57 × 52 inches (267 × 145 × 132 cm)

when activated

Courtesy the artist and Proyectos

Ultravioleta, Guatemala City

### Fred Schmidt-Arenales

*Committee of Six*, 2022

Single channel projection, chairs, carpet

Dimensions variable

Directed and edited by Fred Schmidt-Arenales

Producer: Ellenor Riley-Condit

Cinematography: Mike Gibisser,

Paige Taul, Fred Schmidt-Arenales

Color Correction: Ben Neufeld

Sound Recordist: Jason Culver

Sound Mixer: Philip Rabalais

Costume Designer: Rea Brown

Cast:

Yohance Lacour, Monique Horton, Guadalupe

Mendia, Lance Baker, Cecilia Resende Santos,

Ellenor Riley-Condit, Lauren Miller

Special Thanks:

Mickey Aloisio, Michaela Bathhrick, Laure

Bourgault, Diane Burnham, Bryan Castro,

Ryan Hawk, Maggie Jenson, KAM Isaiah

Israel Congregation, Chelsea Knight, Mary

Leclere, Scott Nelson, Nick Raffle, Jagdeep Raina, Sophia Rhee, Netta Sadovsky, Karen Schiff, Mike Schuh, Sindhu Thirumalaisamy, Monika Uchiyama, Helen Williams, Wendy Williams, Akeema-Zane

This project is funded in part by the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts.

### Alan Martín Segal

*Incomplete Disappearances*, 2022

Video installation

Dimensions variable

Music composition by Ailín Grad

### Stella Zhong

*Spontaneous Unmixing of Static and 1/3s*

*Is Never Observed (Fig.1)*, 2022

String, various clays, paper, stainless steel

mesh, oil paint, Aqua-Resin, plaster, sand,

epoxy, paint, concrete, wood

19 × 120 × 22 inches (48.3 × 305 × 55.9 cm)

*Spontaneous Unmixing of Static and 1/3s*

*Is Never Observed (Fig.2)*, 2022

String, various clays, paper,

stainless steel mesh, sand, epoxy

paint, plaster, concrete, wood.

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Chapter NY

### Monsieur Zohore

in collaboration with Joshua Coyne

*MZ.21 (Pentecost)*, 2017–22

Installation

90 × 32 × 48 inches (229 × 81 × 122 cm)

Courtesy the artist and Half Gallery, New York

Special thanks to Joseph W. Kay

and 6/4 Studios.

*Unless otherwise noted, all works courtesy the artists*

**In Practice: Literally means collapse**

May 12–Aug 1, 2022

*In Practice: Literally means collapse* is curated by Camila Palomino, 2022 In Practice Curatorial Fellow.

Major support for the In Practice program is provided by the Pollock-Krasner Foundation. In Practice is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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