In Practice: Another Echo

Elena Ailes & Simon Belleau
Nobutaka Aozaki
Cudelice Brazelton
Priyanka Dasgupta & Chad Marshall
Carey Denniston
Jules Gimbrone
Baseera Khan
Juliana Cerqueira Leite
Courtney McClellan
Jon Wang
Carmen Winant
Lachell Workman
2017 was a miserable year. In America in particular, with the ushering in of a new and reactionary political regime, it was a time marked by violent assaults to one’s senses, to the safety and wellbeing of so many, and to language itself. Words fell apart. The night POTUS was elected, I sunk into bed and stared at the wall, only to see his shadow projected on it. I had been glued to election coverage for the past year, and on this darkest night realized I had let this man burn himself into the retina of my eye. The phenomenon was akin to an aural echo—an afterimage that lingered in sight from sustained exposure even after it had disappeared. I had lost control of the remote, the screen would not turn off.

There are many notions of what constitutes a public, and one aspect that seems universal is that the public is always personal, even when it is depersonalizing—even when human beings and our planet are treated as integers, or cargo on a boat. Public experiences invade our homes. The public is what we consume on our cell phones in bed before we fall asleep. We absorb it into our bodies, as afterimages and memory accrued while we navigate public institutions or walk to the corner store. The public affects our perception and our capacity for joy—our condition itself.

In our ailing society, with so many of our civil liberties at stake, we need diversified tactics of resistance, and spiritual armor, to change the channel and forge room for all beings. If the public is personal, what we do with our bodies, through voice and language, movement, and mark-making—with materials that we harness and adapt from the earth or the nearby Lowe’s—can too shape our experiences and the forms of the public. We need to conjure and imprint our own ghosts and afterimages, our own echoes.

In curating this exhibition, echo emerged as a term that encompassed the work of reshaping public space while traversing the agitated terrain of contemporary life. An echo suggests an interaction and a return: an emanation that hits a surface and reverberates as instantaneous memory, a powerful tool for envisioning and rewriting history in the present. In Practice: Another Echo convenes twelve artists and artist teams—culled from an open call for submissions—who are doing this work. Often responding to imposed sociopolitical conditions, these artists share a preoccupation with the present moment: obscuring, adapting, and subverting surrounding signs and physical structures in order to inscribe other modes of being into the public—to witness, reinvent, and survive.

The works in this exhibition are fortifying, at times somber or ecstatic—persistent. We often encounter them several times: materials, gestures, and sound literally echo within the space. Across the work, which includes sculpture, live sound, video, and drawing, questions persist about how the self, in the midst of deep inner processing, can converse with the present. How do we, in a divided and unaccommodating society, extend ourselves into the world, particularly when what we need so often is sanctuary?
Throughout the exhibition, symbols appear marked on walls, imprinted and pasted as if in the caves of Lascaux or the prisons where inmates have inscribed their opposition to power. Cudelice Brazelton wields a heat gun with the grace of a barber, burning facade designs—an ancient vernacular carried on bodies throughout history—into the architecture of the building. To see a fade is to see the head turned, a looking away that speaks to protection and self-empowered disregard, an often necessary engagement with one’s environment and the present. Brazelton’s marks—made by scouring heavily dyed denim onto the wall—reflect the code-switching required of the artist while navigating life in the Midwest, from the steel foundry where he worked to his mother’s basement hair salon, a space of care and intimate exchange. We feel their tenderness and tough exterior at the same time. They move across the wallsстыly, with elegance and weight. Like the industrial tools he handles, built for everyday use, Brazelton’s marks speak to the durability of the Black and working-class body, which is constantly expected to endure more, from having lived through a system that has oppressed it. How much can the wall take—what are the limits of one’s spirit and flesh? Brazelton probes the minds of the anonymous figures who bear these designs almost surgically.

Nobutaka Aozaki also collects a visual vernacular, in his case graffiti tags made on Priority Mail labels (USPS 228) that he has found stuck onto surfaces across New York City. Aozaki preserves the labels as a diaristic archive, which in light of New York’s highly corporate and gentrifying real estate market celebrates the creativity of anonymous artists who have devised an ingenious way to act and express themselves without restraint. The labels are a free part of the system, which artists adapt to create a nimble form of protest in public space. They contain anything from signature tags (many of which we see recur in Aozaki’s installation, revealing the persistence of particular individuals) to political cartoons (Yoda wearing Che Guevara’s cap) and aspirational messages (love up yourself). Aozaki annotates each slip with the location and time at which it was found, allowing us to read the shared paths that he and these strangers have traveled, filtered through his moment of encounter. He gathers this fugitive material from a place of admiration, assembling it carefully to recirculate and value it as history and cultural material.

Other artists’ practices involve reading body language made in response to conditions of imposition. Juliana Cerqueira Leite looks to the media, specifically the physical gestures of reporters and civilians sharing their experiences of geopolitical and humanitarian crises. Leite focuses on moments when individuals attempt to communicate or reenact their experiences of events that are beyond their agency, echoing them through the movements of her own body. Moving her arms and hands within a deep crate filled with wet clay, she produces a gestural void that becomes a mold for casting surreal sculptures that express the shortcomings of language and the shared weight of trauma. Though Leite does not claim to know the experiences of her subjects, she literally reenacts their positions to humanize the media so often sensationalizes and to reveal the intimate politics of physically occupying space. Leite covers stories of a little boy in Yemen with burns, immigrants standing up to neo-Nazis in Greece, the arrest of gay and trans people in Lebanon, poverty in Baltimore, and more. Language returns to the sculptures in their titling, fragmented yet indexical to the conditions she enacts: The first problem was the press reporting . . . they ridiculed and belittled . . . a mindset that does not see it as a crime . . . the movement of the earth actually lifted the house . . . back to school after I’ve earned more money . . . part of a struggle that my father, my grandfather, my people overcame in 1988.

Carmen Winant amasses instructional images of women engaged in self-defense from a large archive that she began, subconsciously, during the 2016 presidential election campaign. In a political moment marked by an avalanche of powerful, abusive men through the media, Winant impresses images from the past into a boulder-like mass that we must edge our way around, forming an inconvenient monument to strategies of resistance. The work sits defiantly in the room, the burden of a single victim turned into a collective and public burden. Its title, Looking Forward to Being Attacked, underlines the object’s assertiveness and strength—“I dare you to try me,” it seems to say. Winant’s piece materializes the labor of hundreds of bodies working against imposition and assault as well as her own effort to bring them together in solidarity. Beyond literal assault, which appears in these images entangled with moments of intimacy, the piece speaks to the ways in which one contends more broadly with patriarchy and power structures. How often, for instance, does one have to become a problem while navigating an institution in order to be heard?

Revisionist encounters with existing monuments concern artists such as Basera Khan, who addresses a Richard Serra sculpture installed outside the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, from under an “acoustic sound blanket.” Khan—a queer femme Muslim-American disinflected from Serra’s lineage—threw sneakers up its side, plays trumpet in its interior, three times for a new world order, impresses its steel skin with her soft exterior. Her address is at once sanctimonious and profane. Not unlike her peer M. Lamar, who sings spirituals from under a long black cape, or many popular performers, from MF Doom to Sia, who obscure their bodies in public view, Khan’s blanket provides a space of sanctuary that enables her expression. In her installation [Feat.] she presents the footage, for the first time, as a series of karaoke films spliced with clips of her family, the Indian cult-classic film Pakeezah, and other past performances. The films, which speak to the artist’s experiences of displacement, play in a custom lounge: a Karaoke Spiritual Center of Love, decked with lights cast through a rotating arabesque chandelier and seats stitched from pleather, prayer rugs, her old underweat, and wedding garments. We duck under her blanket to enter an underground: a space to sing and dance away from modernist monumentality and the Confederate statuary in the nearby city center, a space of ecstatic futures. Khan’s playlist features music chosen according to a protective “logic of armor,” music of survival and world-building that gets her through her day, by artists such as Bibi Bourelly, Rihanna, and Kevin Abstract.

Priyanka Dasgupta and Chad Marshall’s installation Passage considers the current plight of American immigration, by revisiting the paths that Blacks and early twentieth-century Bengali sailors took to the United States in the holds of slave ships and the boiler rooms of British merchant vessels. “The New Colossus”—the sonnet by Emma Lazarus engraved on the base of the Statue of Liberty as a welcoming address to immigrants—echoes throughout the installation, newly translated into Yoruba and Bengali and set to traditional music by the artists’ collaborators Moses Mabayoje and Monjula Datta. The sound is mixed to evoke the call-and-response tradition indigenous to both cultures, heard through the distinct forms of music belonging to each: Yoruba drumming and Bengali Bhatiyali boat songs. Passage is indebted to the scholarship of Vivek Bald on the lost histories of Bengali sailors who passed as Black in the early twentieth century, settling into communities of color in the wake of anti-Asian immigration laws in the US. Dasgupta and Marshall’s installation celebrates the spirit and culture that can emerge under conditions of forced displacement (what Frantz Fanon calls a “zone of intoxication”) by critiquing the promise of the American dream. The lights of Times Square glow red at the end of the passage, the Bengali and Yoruba words for “welcome” at times obscuring its signture.

Other artists cast a quiet, haunting eye on the iterative cycles of injustice that occur in the criminal justice system. Courtney McClarian exhibits a new silent video, Midlands (Part I), in which she examines the insidious relationship between performance and the law through her ongoing study of the American Mock Trial Association
and its local team at the University of Georgia, where she teaches. All mock trials are set in Midlands, a fic-
tional state of little consequence, where the power of rhetoric and persuasion is practiced in a recurring score. In Midlands, there is no gender, race, or ethnicity, and all evidence is, paradoxically, fabricated and must be
believed to be true. A witness in one case performs as an attorney in another. McClellan’s video conjoints a typed
description of the state of Midlands with drone-like camera footage that surveys the highly subjective space of
an empty, iconic courtroom at the University of Georgia, where mock trials and Supreme Court proceedings are
regularly conducted. The piece speaks to the bias and privilege built into the mechanisms of the law—its frequent
blindness to the experience of a person actually pushed through the justice system—by bringing the fantasy of
Midlands into the real space of the courtroom.

Lachell Workman’s abstract sculptural installation references the vernacular of the streetside memorial and
the RIP T-shirt, confronting us with a vision of human and environmental neglect. A pool of black asphalt
on the building’s basement floor appears heavy and cracked, dragged across a mess of T-shirts. Workman works
abstraction to make a pointedly political installation that speaks to the Black lives that endure concerted public
violence and are routinely destroyed without repercussions. Untitled, Ode to Cloaked in Black addresses the
toxic, responsive materials and audio. An ensemble of glass vessels, placed in a line and filled with salt water and
the resonant vessels—the feedback of the microphone nearing the surface of the glass, the sound of water poured into
its interior—as well as the artist’s own body; the mic dragged along the hair of a leg, a vocal emanation recorded
from inside the mouth, a hum or hiss. At times, Gimbrone voices the word bad, drawn out and stretched like the
sound of a sheep, disarming the word of its decisive, snap-judgment quality, its assertion of an either this or that.
Gimbrone sounds bad as if turning a POTUS tweet (#verybad) into a vibratory, wordless emanation. Transducers
attached to the vessels let it all play back through the glass—at times to the point of breaking it, which too is
recorded, the broken pieces kept in circuit. Gimbrone scores the final collected sounds to let each piece play indi-
vidually or to sweep through the line, a transmission across one permeable and peculiar body—queer, our natural
state, Gimbrone believes—in a euphoric if at times disorienting environment of sonic touch.

Jon Wang presents an immersive live-video ecology that meditates on the metamorphic life cycles of silk-
worms, inviting viewers into the artist’s intimate and cinematic pursuit of queer architecture. Through a disorien-
tating array of vantage points and video feeds, Gardens of Perfect Exposure magnifies an LED-bathed structure where
silkworms can be seen spinning their cocoons—alighting to the paradoxes queer spaces and bodies face in
today’s highly mediated world. The piece takes its name from the Garden of Perfect Brightness—the Qing Dynasty
pinnacle of imperial-palace and garden design that was pillaged and destroyed by British and French troops—to
recontextualize the struggle for cultural material. Wang, who learned sericulture from scientist Kathryn Conway,
has created a heated palatial habitat made from banal everyday materials (including a network of bath fixtures,
roof repair fabric, hair, and a TV), which he adapts toward a new, queer function. To observe the piece, viewers
must walk through clear weather-stripping into a room climate controlled for the silkworms’ survival. The instal-
lation points to Wang’s larger artistic practice, which dissolves the lines between hospitality, architecture, and
filmmaking. A voiceover whispers to the worms from below, zooming between their perspective and that of the
viewer to map a larger set of relations. Who is Shimi—the haunting question.

Carey Denniston presents videos edited from an ongoing FaceTime dialogue with Avery, her thirteen-year-old
niece and a digital native living in Eastern Washington. Taken over the course of 2017, the videos are portraits of
a “space of processing” that move through seemingly banal, but honest, conversations about friendship to Avery’s
digestion of current events. Avery speaks unaffectedly and with refreshing candor—a quality typical of her age and
her character, as well as a sign of the remarkable trust and love she has for her Aunt Carey. Denniston has edited
three videos from the footage, which she presents on iPads across from custom cubby-like seats made with denin
jeans like the ones Avery wears, set in the cavities of the building’s narrow basement hallway. We experience each
video intimately, from Denniston’s perspective, as Avery narrates her daily experience from her bedroom, school
lawn, or on walks around her suburban neighborhood. Avery has no problem FaceTiming in public or being herself
on the Internet, but mourns the ’90s—a time she imagines as being free of technology, which would have made
her life more fulfilling. I would go outside, you could ride your bike to an ice-cream shop outside—or whatever. We
learn from Avery the politics of her playground, her exasperation with the constant hurricanes, earthquakes, and
school shootings, and her complex search for “her person”—a solid friend who doesn’t bash her and who shares
her desire to explore abandoned spaces, to talk about the world ending and the nature of the universe. Reminding
us that processing takes many forms, Denniston’s project considers how we can contend with the conditions of
our surroundings while empathetically extending ourselves into the world.
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Cudelice Brazelton, Lea, 2018, installation view.
SculptureCenter

In Practice: Another Echo

Priyanka Dasgupta & Chad Marshall, Passage, 2018, detail.
Elena Ailes & Simon Belleau, burning, 2018, detail.
In Practice: Another Echo

Juliana Cerqueira Leite, detail.

Boosea Khan, (Feat.), 2018, detail.
Baseera Khan, *[Feat.]*, 2018, detail.

Baseera Khan, *[Feat.]*, 2018, detail.

Baseera Khan, *[Feat.]*, 2018, video still.

*If I go, I'mma start a riot*
Midlands is a state.
Midlands occupies no land or territory.
Midlands is governed by U.S. Federal Law.
Midlands is U.S. Federal Law.
In Midlands, there is no gender, race, or ethnicity.
In Midlands, all evidence must be believed to be true.
All evidence in Midlands is fabricated.
It is possible that someone acts as a witness in one case,
but performs as an attorney in another.
Witnesses must pretend.
In Practice: Another Echo

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Carey Denniston, installation view. Carey Denniston, details.
Checklist of Works in the Exhibition

Elena Ailes & Simon Belleau

Passing, 2018
Leather, resin, mushrooms, wax, stone, canary wing, rubber latex, resin, horsehair, brass, steel Dimensions variable

Nobutaka Aozaki

Label 228 (July 1, 2017 – Jan 17, 2018), 2018
Found USPS Label 228 stickers mounted on vellum, pen on paper Dimensions variable

Cudelice Brazelton

Crown, 2018
Scorched denim on wall Dimensions variable

Leo, 2018
Scorched denim on wall Dimensions variable

Saber, 2018
Scorched denim on wall Dimensions variable

Sting, 2018
Scorched denim Dimensions variable

Priyanka Dasgupta & Chad Marshall

Passage, 2018
Cedar, mirrored plexiglass, video, sound Voice: Monjula Datta, Moses Masabaye Sound mixing: Charles Okanlawon Dimensions variable

Carey Denniston

2017 was a crazy year for me. I did A. Lat. Of traveling, I met some amazing people I will never forget. I get another sister-in-law. I saw my brother graduate boot camp, and a lot more. My mental health went up and down and I continue to learn how to deal with things. 2017 was a year of figuring out who I am and where I stand who the people I surrounded myself with are good for me. I couldn’t care less about being myself on the internet and around people thanks to some of the inspiring people I’ve come to know and love. I’ve expressed so much through music, art, and photography that without these things I would probably be going crazy by now. Although there was a lot of downs of 2017, there was a lot of ups and I’m excited about 2018. 2018 Three videos on iPads, denim, plywood, foam, lights, speakers Videos: 20 minutes, 25 minutes, 25 minutes Dimensions variable

Jules Ginbrone

Dysmorphias Draw a Line, 2018
Recordings of feedback between vessels and of the artist’s body, rotting fruit, glass shards, Gatorade, salt water, glycerin soap, grapefruit peels, razor blades, vegetable oil, beeswax, pigment, hair, tactile transducers, multi-channel amplifier, computer, audio interface, speaker cable, rubber, miscellaneous Items Dimensions variable

Baseera Khan

(Feat.1), 2018
Custom lounge with eight unique seating panels with pleather, artist’s underwear, prayer rugs, and LED lighting; fourteen karaoke videos, acoustic fabric ceiling, black and gold mirrored plexiglass chandelier Dimensions variable Courtesy the artist and OSMOS, New York

Juliana Cerqueira Leite

“The first problem we had was reporting... they ridiculed and belittled...a mindset that does not see it as a crime...the movement of the earth actually lifted the house...back to school after I’ve earned more money...part of a struggle that my father, my grandfather, my people overcame in 1988”, 2018 Forton MG, pigment, steel, glass fibers 36 x 27 x 23 inches (91.4 x 68.6 x 58.4 cm)

“Who speaks english?...Pakistan, then Turkey, then United States....this place has become known as where the river is born and dies...Did you at any point ask them why...when will I get married? When I finish my studies”, 2018 Forton MG, pigment, steel, glass fibers 30 x 34 x 22 inches (76.2 x 86.4 x 55.9 cm)

Courtney McClellan

Midlands (Part 1), 2018
HD video 7:34 minutes

Jon Wang

Gardens of Perfect Exposure, 2018
Chromed bath fixtures, siliconware, roof repair fabric, laminated hair, glass gobs, TV, self-watering lights, plexiglass, earrings, HD camcorders, rehydrated mulberry leaves, silk, magnets Dimensions variable

Carmen Wilson

Looking Forward To Being Attacked, 2018
Foam, concrete patch, found images 49 x 41 x 61 inches (124.5 x 104.1 x 155 cm)

Lachel Workman

Hold Me Down, a Litany, 2018
T-shirts, 35mm slide projector, slides Dimensions variable

Untitled, To be Cloaked in Black, 2018
Asphalt, T-shirts Dimensions variable

Except where noted, all works courtesy the artists