

SculptureCenter
In Practice: Material Deviance

Material Deviance

Alexis Wilkinson

The artists included in *Material Deviance* use the quotidian, unassuming stuff of life and its circulation as a means of engaging larger social and infrastructural processes. They look to irregularities, gaps, residues, and altered states, whether found or enacted, as material traces of latent histories and underlying systems of power to expose the invisible forces of regulation, value, and control. While such systems inevitably shape the movement of bodies and things through the world—from the level of the individual to the social—the works on view reveal the cracks through which deviant modes of being and perceiving can emerge.

In the context of the exhibition, “deviance” is used to designate the counter-movements and improvisational maneuvers that oppose, or otherwise refuse, the organizational structures supporting systems of power. The conventional definition of the term refers to an act outside of or against accepted social norms. Derived from the Latin *deviare*, to turn aside or away, it signals an off-centered, imprecise, or erroneous trajectory. Turning, of course, also implies a circular, pivoting, revolving motion, as much a modification as an about-face. Deviance thus relates to movement and change, marking a force associated with the reorientation and circulation of things outside of their usual course.

Some of the artists actively produce material dissonance: rearranging narratives, altering properties, leaving traces, and otherwise rendering the familiar strange. This group of artists highlights the copious information contained in the materials that surround us, demonstrating the ways that things can be manipulated to escape or subvert the conditions that produce and circulate them. Other artists mine the inherent glitches and irregularities they find in their materials, evidence that things—like bodies—always manage to exceed, and often disrupt, the systems that attempt to contain them.

The strange beauty of the distorted pennies seen in [Virginia Lee Montgomery](#)’s video and sculptural work arises from a kind of double glitch. A rare mechanical failure of the US Mint caused off-center stamping, producing a misshapen coin that reveals its nude copper planchet. While safeguards are in place to destroy error coins prior to circulation, a secondary glitch—the intervention of a subversive employee—allowed the coins to enter the market. While purportedly worthless as currency, these rare objects are now valued at over 1,000 percent of their original value. Montgomery’s presentation of the pennies in succession draws attention to the individualities produced by each mechanical inaccuracy. In an accompanying video, the error coins are launched into motion and spun alongside their perfectly rounded counterparts. These works expose the mutability of value, while also suggesting that error coins, like people, manage to escape the order of capital by way of their anomalous movements.

As pennies circulate, they live close to the body and collect wear as they move. A similar social circulation is mapped by [Jessica Vaughn](#), who examines bus routes, the imprint riders make on their seats, and the accumulation of standardized forms. A floor sculpture composed of scrap bus-seat upholstery points to the limitations of industrial attempts to fabricate a standard form to fit all bodies, displaying the irregular nature of material surplus produced in pursuit of this ideal. Vaughn’s wall-based grids of used bus seats at first appear uniform, but on closer

inspection the textured surface of each seat presents a landscape of wear caused by the repeated pressing and rubbing of bodies during daily commutes. Drawing attention to the city infrastructures that determine bus routes, these works raise questions of social and political circulation. By presenting discarded and retired manufactured objects in an unaltered state, Vaughn’s work offers a way of seeing how things naturally exceed their organizing systems and how, within the standard, bodies have potential for the errant.

While Vaughn’s bus-seat works carry evidence of repeated gestures in the public domain, [Barb Smith](#) conjures the domestic arena, submitting memory foam mattresses to durational bodily acts. Though memory foam is designed to adapt to the body, once pressure is removed the material returns to its original shape—a sequence closer to amnesia than memory. Playing with the notion of “memory” within the foam’s name, Smith emphasizes bodily and domestic memory as alternative modes of recording. Using resin to fix mattresses upright, Smith and a partner wrestle the memory foam into place and hold it until the new form sets, a process that can take up to an hour. The result retains permanent bodily impressions of the sculpture’s intimate, difficult, and messy production, defying the polyurethane’s objective to erase. The resin, however, does not soak all the way through, causing an ongoing internal struggle between the sculpture’s pliant, “naked” center and the outer layer of resin’s ossifying force.

[Jesse Harrod](#) too uses tactile and labor-intensive manipulation to produce her installation of vibrant macramé curtains. The work employs repetition and accumulation to explore difference; when viewed together, the intricately woven and exuberantly patterned planes form a multilayered image and an immersive environment. The planes, with their detailed and ornate knotting, evoke glimpses or fragments of the body. One must navigate through the work, ducking under curtains, brushing panels aside, enacting an intimate physicality that echoes its production. While her engagement with textiles puts Harrod in dialogue with an older generation of feminist artists, her use of parachord—an extremely durable synthetic rope most often used in survivalist settings—upends expectations of the material domains of domestic craft. In oscillating between parts and a whole, looking at and looking through, standing in for the body and in physical relationship to it, Harrod’s work manifests a logic of multiplicity that denies a singular reading or classification.

[Olivia Booth](#)’s glass works evoke a host of associations: eccentric lamp fixtures, strange and fragile instruments, elegant chemistry experiments, and decorative apparatuses. In this way, Booth unsettles a long history of the use of glass as a mechanism of display and as a sculptural material, as well as its more recent application in the fabrication of communication devices and other technologies. Configurations of tube lamps support vessels that might hold fiber-optic cables or melted alchemical mixtures of reflective surfaces. Slumped mirrors and smartphone screens reveal the changes in coloration and distortions of form that result when glass is exposed to heat, making visible the material conditions of global production, trade, and circulation embedded in the chemical properties of the familiar surfaces we encounter daily. The elements central to these works—mirrors, glass, and light—filter our optical experience of the world, and lead the viewer to look at, into, and through several materials at once, making indeterminate the boundaries between interior and exterior, material and form.

While Booth brings into focus the apparatuses that shape vision, [Crystal Z Campbell](#) excavates images and historical documents to explore the impact of outside forces on populations and the places they inhabit. Her installation places past and present in dialogue, weaving together archival material with fictional narrative. The work can be seen as an exchange between Campbell and the uncredited filmmaker of an untitled 35mm film salvaged from the now-defunct Slave Theater, once a site of activism and community empowerment in the historically black neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant in the ’70s and ’80s. Since its production, the film reel has sustained severe damage, causing its images to be discolored or entirely dissolved. Using two slide projectors,

Campbell combines film stills, archival images, elements from the present, references to martial arts and the destroyed city of Pompeii, and a narrative soundtrack. The result draws connections between the destruction of the film's material and communities contending with the forces of gentrification.

[Ilana Harris-Babou](#)'s video work appropriates the format of the home improvement show. The episode features the hosts—the artist and her mother—instructing viewers on how to execute standard construction tasks aimed at finishing a basement wall. As the video progresses, they misuse renovation materials and techniques, performing futile and sometimes absurd tasks. In this way, the work privileges the performance of labor, potential, and intimacy over practical improvement or a finished job. Dialogue slips between improvisation, real and constructed identities, candid conversations, and excerpts of texts by Audre Lorde, Marcus Garvey, Reconstruction Era field orders, the testimonies of nineteenth-century black homesteaders, and *This Old House* episodes. In the end, the aspirational complex exemplified by the conventional home improvement show, a paradigmatic marker of the American dream, is turned on its head.

Also evoking a familiar yet strange interior space, [Lauren Bakst & Yuri Masnyj](#)'s installation is populated with nearly recognizable items. Utilizing a set of movable objects that serve as both prop and sculpture, the artists investigate the slippery relationship between bodies and objects. Shelves support this collection of objects, which reference domestic items, elemental shapes, and natural forms, veering from the familiar to the strange by way of unexpected approaches to texture and weight. A series of performances take place over the course of the exhibition in which Bakst and Masnyj remove and reorganize these objects, drawing from a lexicon of movements, text, and sound. Abstracted gestures and sounds collapse the things at hand with things that are absent, defying one's expectations about intended use and material nature.

Assembling cast-off, rejected, and abject materials, [Marian Tubbs](#) troubles normative ascriptions of value through a material exploration of the circuitous relationships between people, ecosystems, and trash. Considering routes that discarded plastics take as they move through various systems, Tubbs draws connections between the continual flows of capital, water, and trash. In plastic assemblages and hybrid objects that merge organic matter with discarded waste, Tubbs points to the ecological reality of the global circulation of plastics in large bodies of water by way of seductive abstraction and messy elegance. Adorning industrial grids that obstruct a straightforward passage through space, the works encourage an encounter in dialogue with the body.

The ocean, an expanse where global capital flows are entangled with the history of colonial movement, is also where [Danielle Dean](#)'s two-channel video begins. The work merges historical events with the present in order to examine the material and ideological forces that construct and regulate identity. The video was shot in low-income housing complexes in Houston, Texas, amid rudimentary set pieces like cardboard cutouts and banners that borrow from the language of marketing displays. Dean and her sister Ashstress shift between personal narratives and a fictionalized reenactment of the events surrounding the erection of Elmina Castle. Built by the Portuguese on the coast of Ghana in the fifteenth-century for trade purposes, the castle was ultimately deployed to facilitate the country's slave economy, and came to represent the forced movement of bodies embedded in the forces of colonialism and capitalism. In collapsing fiction, reality, metaphor, and historical account, strategic slippages emerge where past events and present narrative are inseparably entangled, a reminder that the historical structures that determine one's movement in the world continue to impact black life.

Bringing together material residues of human activity and the natural environment, [Kate Newby](#)'s quiet sculptural interventions exist in varying states of permanence and transition. Responding to the anatomy of SculptureCenter's subterranean and outdoor spaces, Newby establishes a spatial and scalar shift, from the

building's lowest to highest points and from the miniscule to the large. The materials she uses are intimately related to where she places them; a collection of ceramic rocks lining the basement's gutter are made with materials and processes in conversation with the ground, like forms produced through contact with the artist's own basement or clay dug in Long Island City. Outside, embedded into the courtyard's floor are concrete puddles that will collect rainwater, snow, and other organic matter throughout the exhibition's winter months. In both the courtyard and the basement, colored cords draw the eye upward, leading to other sculptural elements and calling attention to the space itself. In making work designed to change or that risks being overlooked, Newby reorients conventional systems of value that privilege permanence and visibility, and instead establishes her own value system predicated on change, disappearance, and individual encounters.

Exploring the relationship between components and the whole, the solo body and the ensemble, the cellular and the astronomical, [Kim Brandt](#)'s work is performed at 4pm every day the exhibition is open. Informed by individual and collective bodies' somatic responses to specific spaces and the internal sensorial experience of a dancer, the work uses both sculptural and visual language. Following the organizing mechanism of the loop or cycle, dancers carry out solos in the basement corridors daily, feeding into a collective form in the upstairs lobby weekly. While the scores will naturally be carried out differently each day, they all follow the same trajectory, and always culminate at the end of the week as an accumulation. The work operates in a mode of continued and evolving presence alongside the other works in the galleries, evading the conventional temporal structures that frame both performance and exhibitions. Using repetition, duration, and presence, Brandt proposes new ways of seeing that emphasize physical encounters and ongoing change.

[Candice Lin](#) and [Patrick Staff](#) similarly make a case for indeterminacy and the fluidity of things, their work wavering between sculpture and event, the embodied and the visual. During the course of the exhibition, their homemade fog machine periodically releases into the gallery space a cloud laced with anti-androgen botanicals, purportedly altering the hormonal levels of those who pass through. The mist contains common ingredients such as hops or licorice that, when ingested, are known to inhibit the production of testosterone in the body. In circulating anti-androgens in the form of a fog, the artists make visible matter that regulates the body and at the same time inhibits the visitor's ability to see, emphasizing the comparable permeability and changeability of the body's boundaries. The fog-dispensing device is "hacked," built from common household materials, referencing the social, political, and colonial histories of self-medicating, particularly in relation to reproductive health, the AIDS crisis, and hormone treatment.

Each work in *Material Deviance* emphasizes intimate contact and haptic relationships. Often, this is seen in the traces of bodily contact with objects encountered in daily life, whether pennies, rocks, bus seats, smartphone screens, or mattresses. At other times, this contact is made visible through performance: brick walls are stroked and scratched; handheld sculptures are caressed, arranged, and rearranged; or groups of bodies interact with architecture and with one another. And finally, it may manifest through a viewer's physical encounter with a work: brushing up against woven planes of paracord; navigating around industrial grids; or entering and inhaling a fragrant haze. In these ways, the artists included in the exhibition propose that knowing is related to feeling, and that feeling is deviant because it cannot be measured, contained, or fixed, but rather is in a state of perpetual transition, always ripe with potential. In resisting a final state, their works offer modes of continuous and intimate exchange that occur when bodies and materials move alongside or in friction with one another—teasing out the circuitous, and sometimes absurd, movements found between uniformity and difference, function and non-function, control and subversion.



Kate Newby, *Not this time, not for me.*, 2017, installation view.



Installation view.



Kim Brandt, *The Volume*, 2017, performance view.



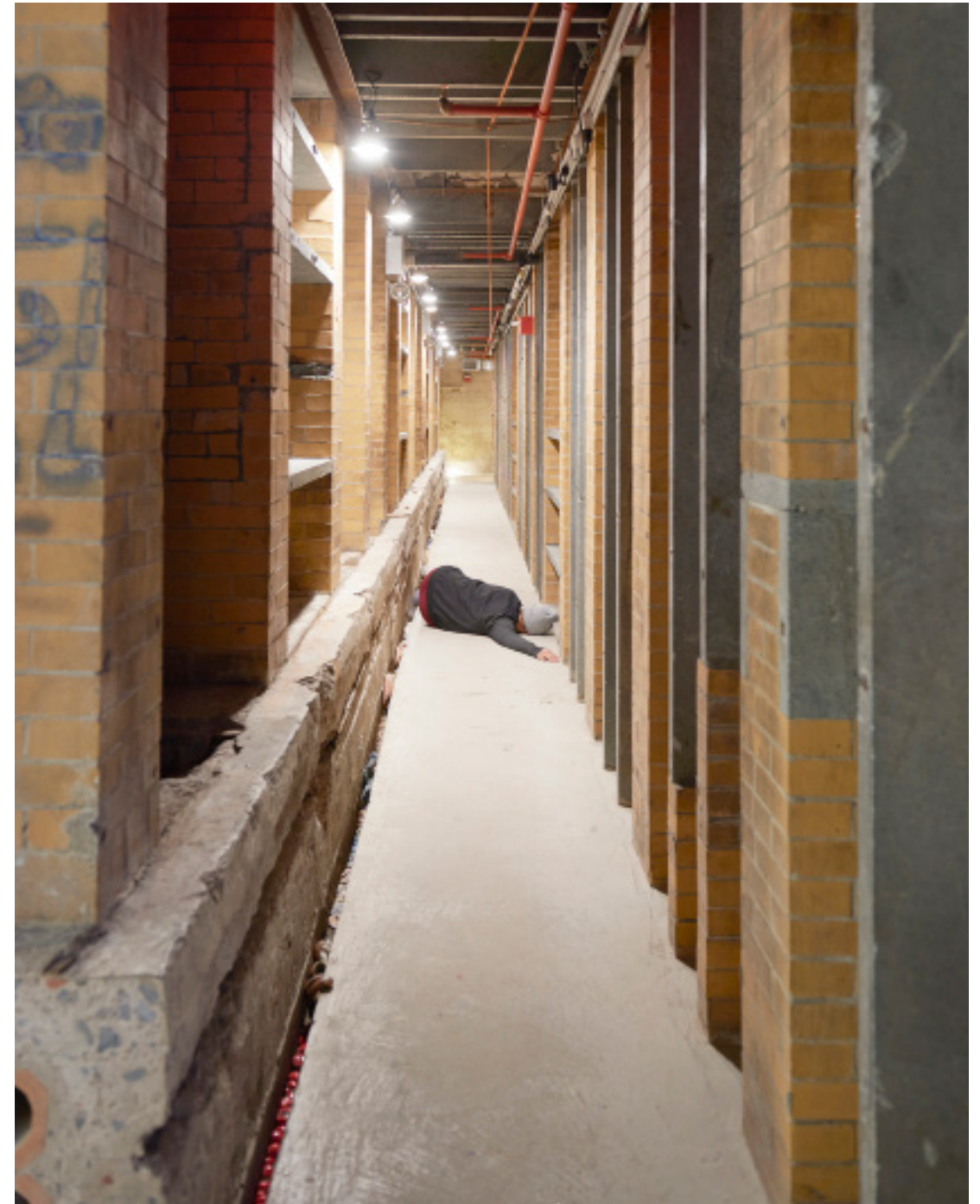
Jessica Vaughn, *Surplus: Tropicana Grey No.103; Newport Cadet Blue No. 688; Oxen Black No. 001; Oxen Dark Blue No. 642; Oxen Gray No. 672.*, 2016–17, installation view.



Jessica Vaughn, *After Willis (rubbed, used and moved) #004*, 2017, detail.



Ilana Harris-Babou, *Finishing A Raw Basement*, 2017, installation view.



Installation view.



Kate Newby, *My list of places to drop in on regularly.*, 2017, detail.



Olivia Booth, *Go Easy With Me V*, 2017, detail.





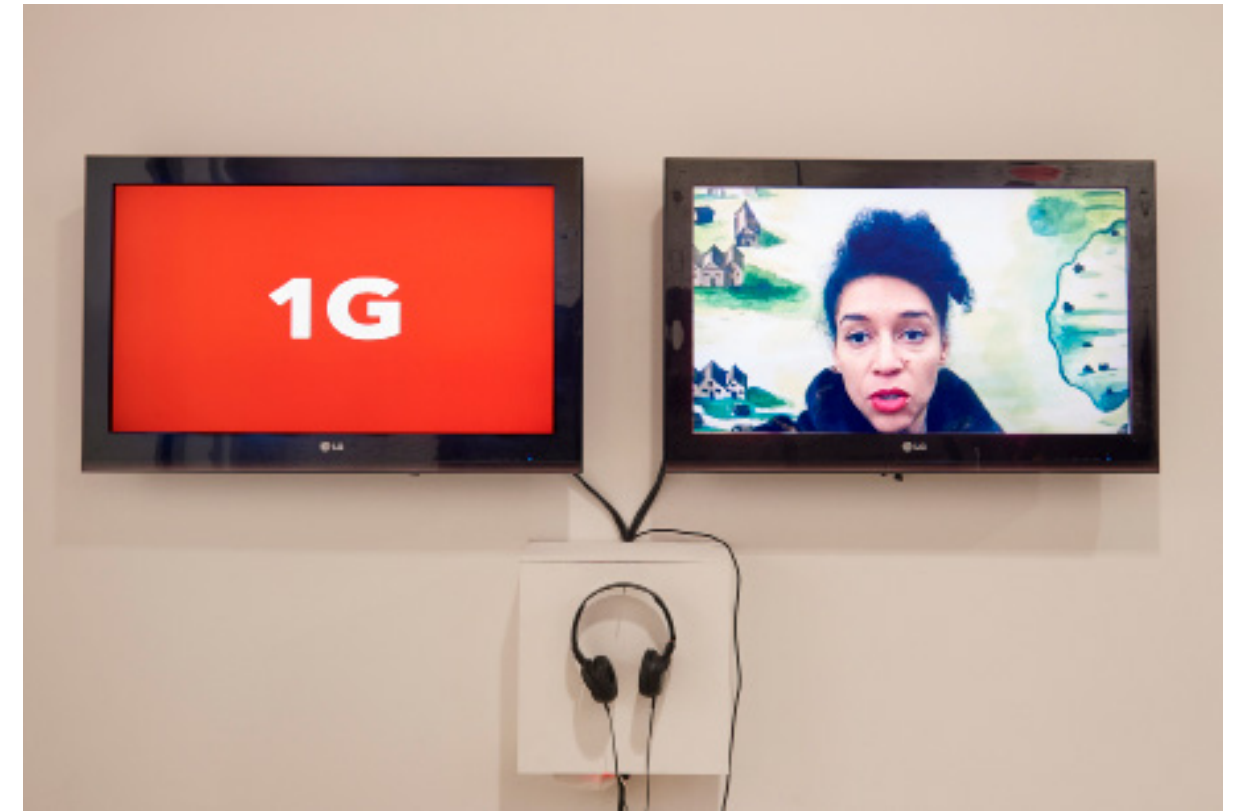
Marian Tubbs, installation view.



Jesse Harrod, *Taught tight tender sway*, 2017, installation view.



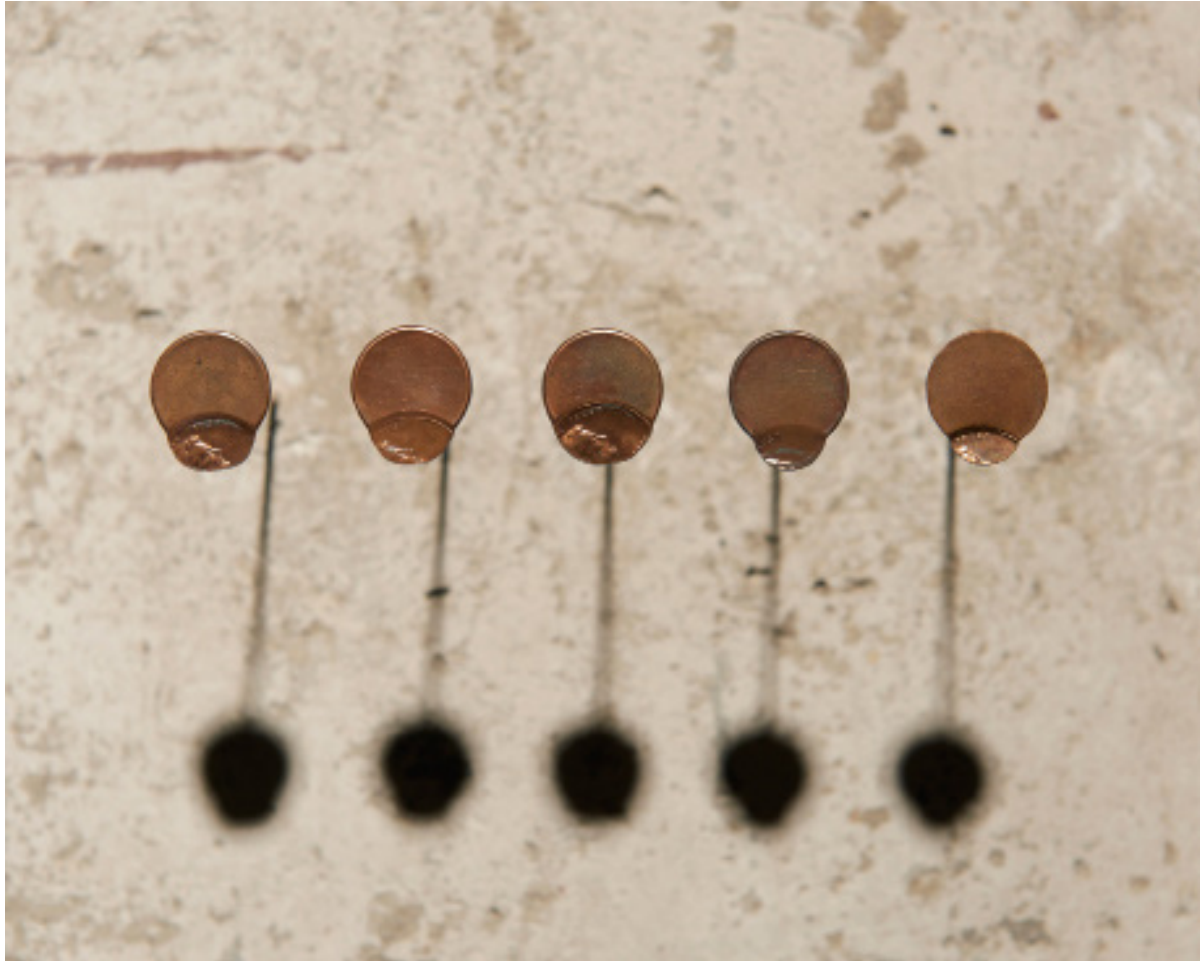
Candice Lin and Patrick Staff, *Hormonal System*, 2017, installation view.



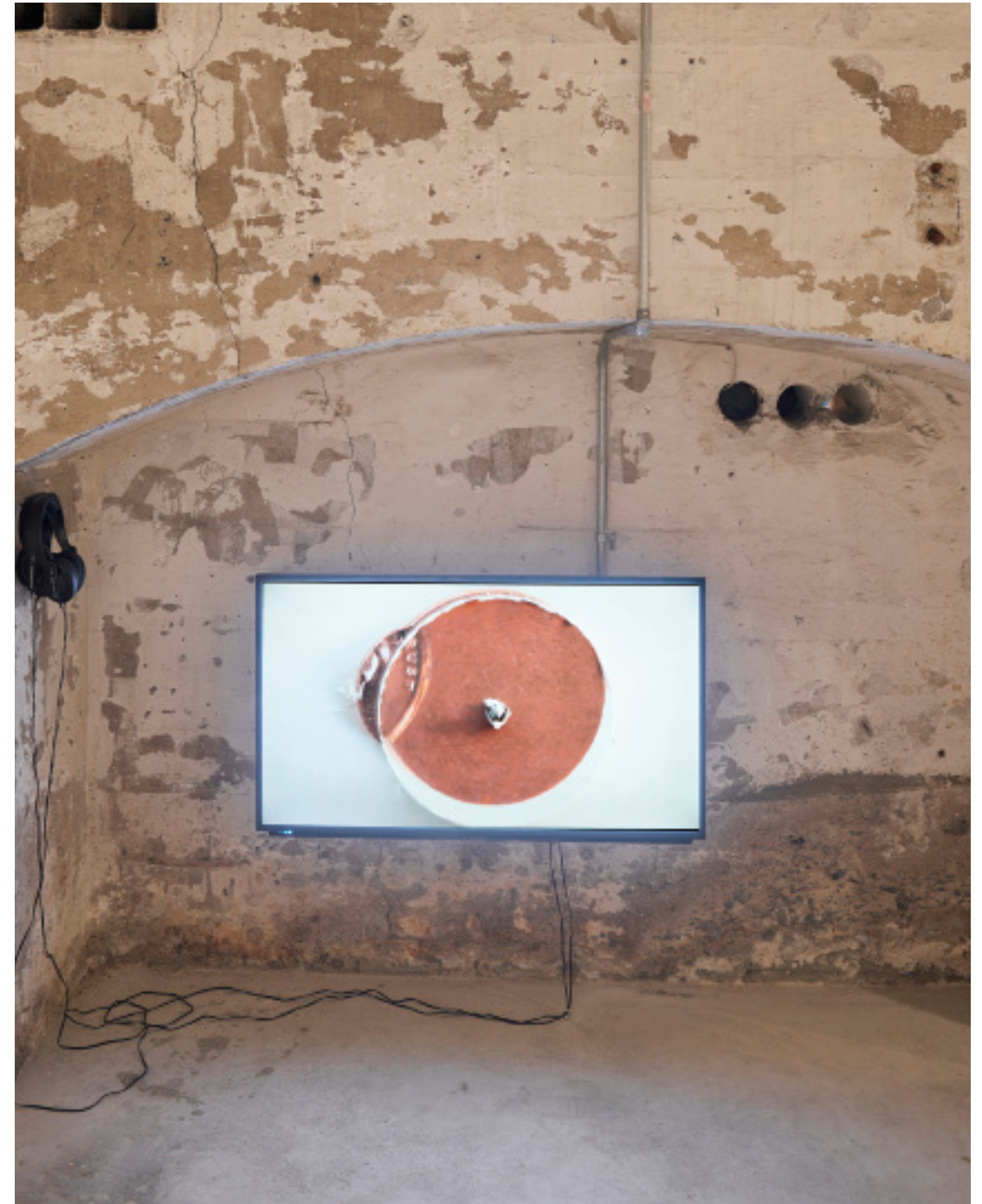
Danielle Dean, *True Red Ruin (Elmina Castle)*, 2017, installation view.



Lauren Bakst & Yuri Masnyj, *Temporary Walls*, 2017, performance view.



Virginia Lee Montgomery, *Lincoln looks at the moon*, 2017, installation view.



Virginia Lee Montgomery, *Beyond means*, 2017, installation view.



Barb Smith, *Untitled*, 2017, installation view.

Checklist of Works in the Exhibition

Lauren Bakst & Yuri Masnyj

Temporary Walls, 2017

Installation and performance
30 minutes; dimensions variable
Two-channel audio, wood, paper,
plaster, metal, acrylic paint, ink,
graphite

Olivia Booth

Go Easy With Me I, 2017

Glass (melted vase, borosilicate),
microfilament, paint, metal, electrical
44 x 44 x 4 inches
(111.8 x 111.8 x 10.2 cm)

Go Easy With Me II, 2017

Glass (melted vases, melted computer
screens, borosilicate), mallet, metal,
electrical
46 x 26 inches (116.8 x 66 cm)

Go Easy With Me III, 2017

Glass (melted vase, borosilicate),
metal, track, electrical
60 x 40 x 12 inches
(152.4 x 101.6 x 30.5 cm)

Go Easy With Me IV, 2017

Glass (melted vases, melted iPhone
screens, melted mirror, rondel,
borosilicate, "fiberoptic"), plastic
stands, metal, electrical
24 x 12 x 15 inches
(61 x 30.5 x 38.1 cm)

Go Easy With Me V, 2017

Glass ("fiberoptic," borosilicate),
assemblage, metal, electrical
90 x 18 x 7 inches
(228.6 x 45.7 x 17.8 cm)

Glass fabrication assistance by Nicole
Stahl and Neptune Glassworks, Los
Angeles

Kim Brandt

The Volume, 2017

Performance, first floor and lower level
Daily at 4pm, duration variable

Performed by Anna Adams Stark, Lydia
Adler Okrent, Liz Charky, Meg Clixby,
Jessica Cook, Courtney Cooke, Leslie
Cuyjet, Katie Dean, Greer Dworman,
Ayano Elson, Kay Ottinger, Nora
Stephens and Tara Willis

Crystal Z Campbell

Go-Rilla Means War, 2017

35mm slides, 35mm slide projectors,
custom seating, paint, LEDs, stereo
sound, speakers
365 seconds

Production assistance by Ezer
Longinus, Brooklyn Research;
Gammatech; and Hardesty Center for
Fab Lab, Tulsa. Research assistance by
Paley Center for Media, Los Angeles;
Schomburg Center for Research in
Black Culture, New York; Brooklyn
Public Library; Brooklyn Historical
Society; The Slave #1 Theater and
Slave #2 Theater; University of Tulsa.
Additional support by the Foundation
for Contemporary Arts; Tulsa Artist
Fellowship; Yaddo; Mondriaan Fonds;
Living Arts; Circle Cinema, Tulsa

Danielle Dean

True Red Ruin (Elmina Castle), 2017

HD video; two-channel digital video
installation
9:39 minutes

Performers: Ashstress Agwunobi,
Adrienne Campbell, Danielle Dean,
Twilana Flowers, Kalia Flowers,
Christopher Warren; Camera: Sharad
Patel; Camera assistance: Stephen
Wilson; Sound: Tish Stringer; Sound
mix: Aidan Reynolds; Color grade: Paul
Kyle; Props: Joel Freeman

Ilana Harris-Babou

Finishing A Raw Basement, 2017
HD video
6:41 minutes

Jesse Harrod

Taught tight tender sway, 2017
Paracord, rope, cock rings, acrylic
Dimensions variable

Candice Lin and Patrick Staff

A Fine Hormonal Mist, 2017
Printed rolling paper, hops, licorice root, black cohosh root, dong quai
Dimensions variable

Hormonal System, 2017
Wood, rebar, bailing wire, clamps, epoxy putty, rope, buckets, bungee cords, glass jars, plastic jugs, plastic funnel, plastic tubing, zip ties, aluminum ducting, fog machine, fog fluid, hops, licorice root, black cohosh root, dong quai, vodka, rope, wire, buckets
Dimensions variable

Virginia Lee Montgomery

Beyond means, 2017
HD video
2:16 minutes

Lincoln looks at the moon, 2017
Copper alloy misprints, copper rods
1 x 7.5 x 5 inches
(2.5 x 19.1 x 12.7 cm)

Kate Newby

A desert, plain and dry., 2017
Pit fired stoneware, salt fired stoneware, porcelain, earthenware, carved bricks, sand
Dimensions variable

My list of places to drop in on regularly., 2017

Hand-dyed cotton rope, hand-dyed silk thread, pink silver, silver, white brass, bronze
Dimensions variable

Not this time, not for me., 2017

Mortar, concrete pigment, silver, white brass, bronze, porcelain, cotton rope, blown glass, glass, stoneware
Dimensions variable
Glass fabrication by Leo Tecosky

Plants. Songs. Food. Clothes., 2017

Glass
Dimensions variable
Glass fabrication by Leo Tecosky

Barb Smith

Untitled, 2017
Memory foam, Aqua-Resin, impressions from two bodies
70 x 52 x 48 inches
(177.8 x 132.1 x 121.9 cm)
Courtesy the artist and Páramo, Guadalajara, Mexico

Made in collaboration with Jean-Jacques du Plessis

Marian Tubbs

anagram, 2017
Fiberglass, Aqua-Resin, orchid moss, ice balls, hair dye, pigment, silicone
21 x 13 x 2 inches (53.3 x 33 x 5.1 cm)

Ptilonorhynchidae, 2017

Steel, found ocean vortex material and growths, dried orchid moss, pigment print on silk, Aqua-Resin, fiberglass, silicone, speaker wire, pigment, hair dye
50 x 42 x 7 inches
(127 x 106.7 x 17.8 cm)

she was entirely lovely yet so unlikable, 2017

Steel, found ocean vortex material and growths, dried orchid moss, orchid, Aqua-Resin, fiberglass, silicone, speaker wire, pigment, hair dye
56 x 60 x 8 inches
(142.2 x 152.4 x 20.3 cm)

stress less, 2017

Fiberglass, Aqua-Resin, silicone, speaker wire, pigment, hair dye, ice ball
13.5 x 17 x 4 inches
(34.3 x 43.2 x 10.2 cm)

vortex drip, 2017

Silicone, pigment, orchid moss, orchid
45 x 5.5 x 0.25 inches
(114.3 x 14 x 0.6 cm)

All works courtesy the artist and ltd Los Angeles

Jessica Vaughn

After Willis (rubbed, used and moved) #004, 2017
Twelve individual pairs of used machine-fabricated public transit train seats made of fiberglass and upholstery (Chicago Transit Authority 1998–2007)
Dimensions variable

Surplus: Tropicana Grey No. 103; Newport Cadet Blue No. 688; Oxen Black No. 001; Oxen Dark Blue No. 642; Oxen Gray No. 672., 2016–17
Six vinyl scraps procured from manufacturer (09/2015–11/2016) adhered to found plexiglass
Five pairs; each pair 59 x 24 x 0.5 inches (149.9 x 61 x 1.3 cm)

Except where noted, all works courtesy the artists