

SculptureCenter

Aki Sasamoto: Delicate Cycle



Aki Sasamoto: Delicate Cycle is generously supported by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; the Lambent Foundation Fund of Tides Foundation; the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, in partnership with the City Council; the Kraus Family Foundation; the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Cuomo and the New York State Legislature; the A. Woodner Fund; Jeanne Donovan Fisher; and contributions from our Board of Trustees and Director's Circle. Additional support is provided by the Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation and The Japan Foundation, New York.

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Published by
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ISBN: 9780997281149

Design: Claudia Brandenburg, Language Arts
Copy Editor: Lucy Flint
Printer: RMI Printing, New York

All photographs by Kyle Knodell, 2016
unless otherwise noted.

Aki Sasamoto: Delicate Cycle
September 19, 2016–January 2, 2017

Curated by Ruba Katrib

Performances
September 18, 2016 at 4:30pm
September 24, 2016 at 3pm
October 8, 2016 at 3pm
October 22, 2016 at 3pm
November 19, 2016 at 3pm
December 17, 2016 at 3pm

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Dirt Balls

Ruba Katrib

Ancient Egyptians regarded the balls that dung beetles diligently form as a symbol of the earth. According to Jean-Henri Fabre's 1921 *Book of Insects*, the creature was admired for its cosmic synchronicity: creating microcosms by rolling up feces and dirt, it was engaged in sacred activity. However, as Fabre explains in the chapter "The Sacred Beetle," the beetle's balls are actually a food source: "It is not at all nice food. For the work of this Beetle is to scour the filth from the surface of the soil. The ball he rolls so carefully is made of his sweepings from the roads and fields." The scavenger busily creating work, pleasure, and nourishment from debris is the metaphorical underpinning of Aki Sasamoto's exhibition *Delicate Cycle*.

Taking her cue from the beetle, Sasamoto puts her shoulder to work that evolves over the course of the exhibition. References to notions around the human aversion to dirt abound—from shoes to laundry mats to bathroom stalls. Yet while the "delicate cycle" refers to the washing machine setting for our more sensitive clothing items, it also suggests the patient labor of the dung beetle, whose repetitious task is more rewarding than Sisyphean. The creature's aggregative ball is laboriously pushed up, down, over, and around to the hidden place where it is devoured. Sasamoto dives into the unconscious drives related to the idea of "underground" as evoked by the dung beetle's subterranean storage place. For SculptureCenter's lower-level exhibition space, she has created sculptures and an ongoing performance that make physical and verbal links between base elements. The unnoticed world at our feet—its insects and its soil—inspires a circular task of dirtying and cleansing. The process of washing is marked by customs that fit into particular architectural spaces, institutions, and machines referenced in the exhibition.

The exhibition includes actual washing machines and dryers as well as a large ball made of bed sheets that fits neatly into an arched corridor—an object whose scale overpowers Sasamoto's as she walks on her hands and pushes it with her feet down the length of the space during a series of performances presented throughout the run of the exhibition at SculptureCenter. In addition, there are two abstracted "washroom" sculptures that she activates with a system of pulleys, intimate stalls that rock back and forth in a motion reminiscent of the beetle's. Hundreds of shoeboxes line the walls of a narrow passageway, several containing passages of Fabre's book on the dung beetle printed on crumpled tissue paper, visible through peepholes. The micro and macro elements of the

exhibition come to the fore in a video, shown on monitors installed in high corners, that combines a voiceover of Sasamoto reading about the dung beetle's activity with footage and audio of a washing machine in operation. The human and machine sounds fill the space, generating a narrative of human and insect invention and an examination of relationships to waste and resources. Interspersed are shots of colorful parakeets singing in SculptureCenter's arched corridor and footage of the cotton ball rolling along its length, in stops and starts, hitting walls and seeming to move by an invisible force.

The connections Sasamoto makes in her lexicon, at times perverse, are overseen by the parakeets, aerial observers of the exhibition activities below. Distinctly out of place in the cavernous gallery spaces, the birds remind us of the world outside the confines of the exhibition's underground realm. Sasamoto continues to connect her world to ours with a courtyard sculpture located on the ground floor, which includes an Amish pulley system for hanging laundry out to dry, filled with sheets that will end up in the cotton ball downstairs.

Underground, various light sources guide the visitor through the mine-like space. Illumination is referenced in the headlamps Sasamoto wears during the performances, which are attached to the washroom sculptures when not in use. There are also idiosyncratic light fixtures—sconces dressed up with high-end shoebox lids attached to the aluminum backings of old washing machines. And small circles of light glow from the apertures in the select shoeboxes. With lighting, Sasamoto penetrates dark passageways of many kinds.

For Sasamoto, performance and sculpture are intertwined. Even the elements of her exhibition that are not interactive suggest movement and alteration over time. One room includes magnetic panels used in the washroom sculptures during the performances. After each performance, the panels are returned to the gallery to display her diagrammatic drawings and spoons. The diagrams refer to the narrative Sasamoto weaves during her performances, disparate stories about stains and attempts to remove them, from toothpaste used to remove graffiti to a tale of a chatty old man she would encounter when she would do the laundry in her hometown, who once was so engrossed in his speech that he continued, oblivious that a bird had relieved itself on his bald forehead. Recording each performance in abstracted illustrations, these boards speak to the flexibility and evolutionary quality of the exhibition. Reminders that Sasamoto is on the move.

Connected, Divided, Spun: Aki Sasamoto's Rotational Logic

Josephine Graf

To encounter Aki Sasamoto's particular melding of performance and sculpture is to enter a shifting, kaleidoscopic landscape of objects, actions, and words. Its elements might appear commonplace—washing machines, shoeboxes, or bed sheets, as in her present exhibition at SculptureCenter, *Delicate Cycle*—but the coordinates of its reality have most definitely been set askew, the unidirectional grip of cause and effect loosened.

Language figures centrally, and Sasamoto often adopts the role of storyteller or lecturer: in a tone alternately conversational and didactic, she invokes the minutely personal—a dislike of mosquitoes, dessert preferences, the invitation to her brother's wedding—in order to explain such sweeping subjects as romance or the roots of artistic disposition. In a piece titled *Sunny in the Furnace*, presented at The Kitchen in 2014, reference to an injured foot segued into diagramming the two “diseases” necessary for becoming an artist (“charismatic syndrome” and “strategic syndrome”), before Sasamoto reached the conclusion that all successful people drink rosé. In a 2015 project at Frieze New York, a labyrinthine three-dimensional personality test confronted viewers with a series of trivial choices (“coffee or tea?”) that eventually matched them with one of seven personality types—unlikely descriptors such as “old,” “vague,” “candy,” or “big.”

A deadpan humor arises from these incongruities and scalar shifts, whereby the subjective and seemingly inconsequential is marshaled into an “objective” (often clichéd) world order whose absurdity grows in correlation with the conviction it solicits. Sasamoto seems to ape a contemporary logic in which pronouncements of taste concerning what we eat and buy or how we maintain our homes are irrevocably tied to our potential for a fully satiated life, one of absolute self-knowledge. Her approach recalls Alfred Jarry's *pataphysics*, an absurdist's metaphysics, insofar as both apply reason's tools in so exaggerated and indiscriminate a manner as to level the conceptual hierarchies that make it work in the first place. Yet, like Jarry's, Sasamoto's is by no means a moralizing critique. Rather, she displays genuine interest in the judgments and categorizations through which we reconcile the world—it's just that she shakes them up a bit, scrambles their compasses. It is therefore fitting that her SculptureCenter exhibition takes as inspiration the habits of the humble dung beetle, which rolls excrement into spheres doubling as sustenance and shelter: theirs are simply different preferences, albeit ones that reorient engrained ideas of high and low.

While performing, Sasamoto moves among ensembles of objects. These typically remain as sculptural installations between performances and are often composed of everyday household items, altered slightly: trashcans, mops, chests of drawers, fans, chairs, or shoes, to name a few that recur with some frequency. Curiously combined (office chairs topped with shoes to become skates, for example) or linked by webs of rope or wire, they physicalize—by means of their juxtaposition or relative proximity—Sasamoto's accompanying linguistic play. Yet she does not so much place her objects in conversation as cajole them into acting as her interlocutor or accomplice, imbuing them with agency as she alights on them. Her path is acrobatic and slapstick, with something of a contortionist's weightless agility. She shimmies along poles (*Skewed Lies/Central Governor*, 2010), scoots around in a wheeled trashcan (*Wrong Happy Hour*, 2014), or lodges herself inside an old-fashioned writing desk, achieving a kind of sustained inanimate embrace (*Sunny in the Furnace*, 2014). In *Delicate Cycle*, one moment witnesses her tucked within the rotating drum of an industrial washing machine, another rolling an enormous ball of knotted sheets down SculptureCenter's lower-level corridor in the manner of the dung beetle.

But, the same elements that partner or connect—the desk that hugs, the washing machine that cradles, the wires that trace alliances between objects—can flip suddenly into constraints. Moments arise in each of Sasamoto's performances in which she seems trapped, her body balanced precariously, tangled, or contorted. Gravity returns to remind us that what connects can also divide: the affiliations and diagrams we draw to guide action might also pen us in; spaces whose intimacy was once cozy can turn suffocatingly claustrophobic. In *Wrong Happy Hour*, presented at JTT on the Lower East Side in 2014, Sasamoto mingled with her audience in a bar-like atmosphere before abruptly disappearing. The event ended suddenly when she began pushing the gallery's rear wall (fitted with wheels) from behind, not only forcing her audience onto the street but leaving herself inside, all alone.

These momentary dramas are, like those of an escape artist, predicaments of Sasamoto's own devising. In this sense, her scenarios operate along the lines of a feedback loop of cascading and cyclical interactions in which control is gained and lost in turn. She might catalyze these feedback loops, but they subsequently set her in motion—a release of agency whereby we find her folded inside a washing machine, knees to chin, spinning to a rotational logic beyond her control.

If you are a sock, perhaps the left one, and get put in a triple wash drum with a huge load, the upcoming half an hour is going to be an athletic challenge to escape the beating bed sheets that try to eat you. Once you get caught up in a corner pouch with elastic gathering, it will be super hard to get out of the tight squeeze of this big fabric. The worst is in the dryer, and for each 25 cents worth of 7 minutes, a lone sock can get steamed in a tangle, never seeing the future to be well dried.

How often should bed sheets be washed?

If you are not bound for the industrial dryer, however, you can be rescued when the human pulls you out and gives you massaging stretch. You climb up the clothesline, with the background music of big fabrics being beaten. You have some distance from the sheets, and you can now get drunk in the sun, enjoy the breeze, until you get tied up again with your right sock.

When exactly does laundry turn back into clothes?

Socks are real tough workers. On the foot and in the shoe, pressure-cooked until smelly. While I sit in the plastic Laundromat chair staring into the changing waterscape across the row of the washers, I praise the journey of each clothing item. As the spin cycle approaches I fixate on the degree to which my lifestyle surrounds the tasks of managing these necessary belongings.

— Aki Sasamoto



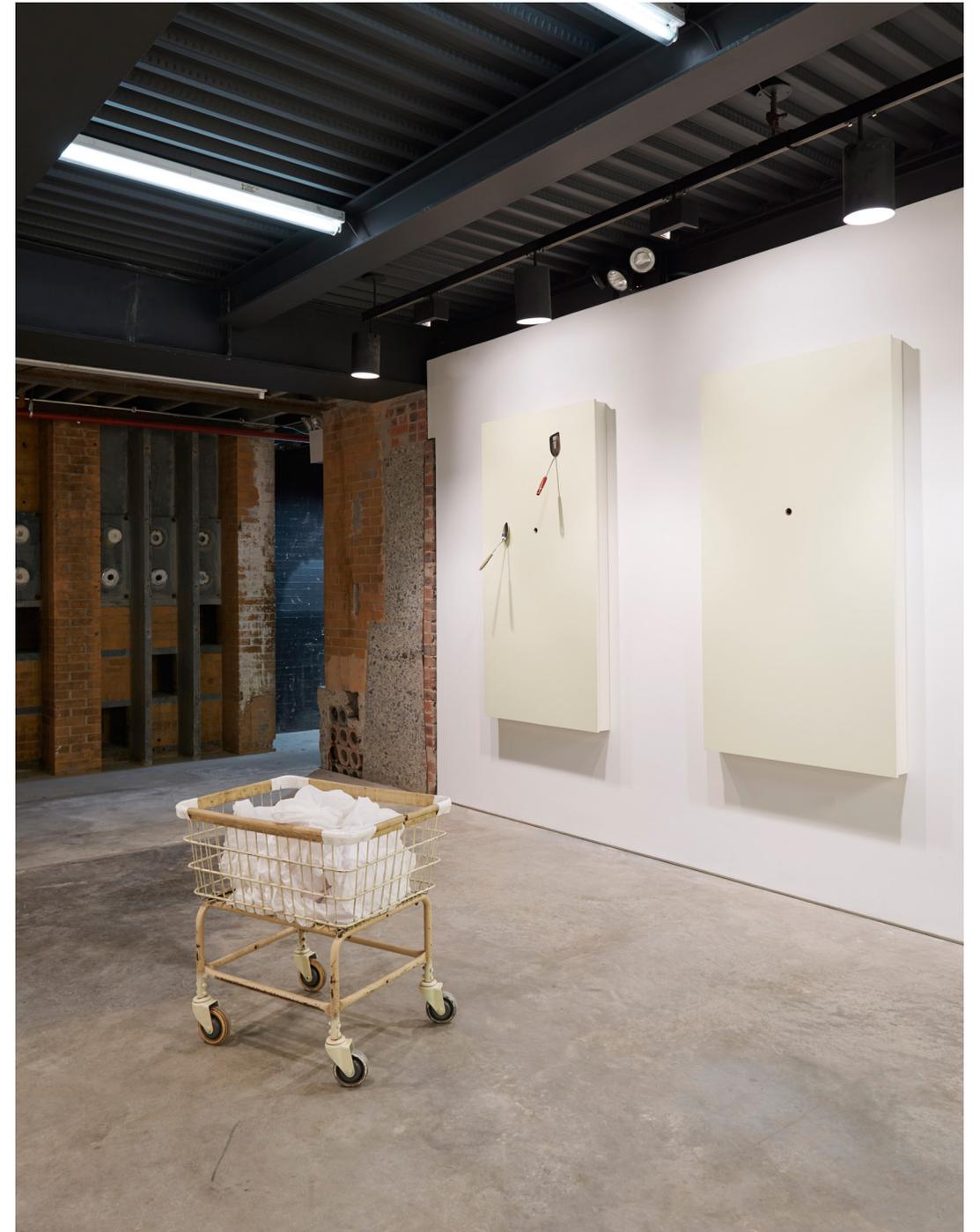
Installation view.



Installation view.



Washboard Belt — Maidrite, 2016, installation view.



Installation view.



Installation view.



Installation view.



Delicate Cycle, 2016, performance view.



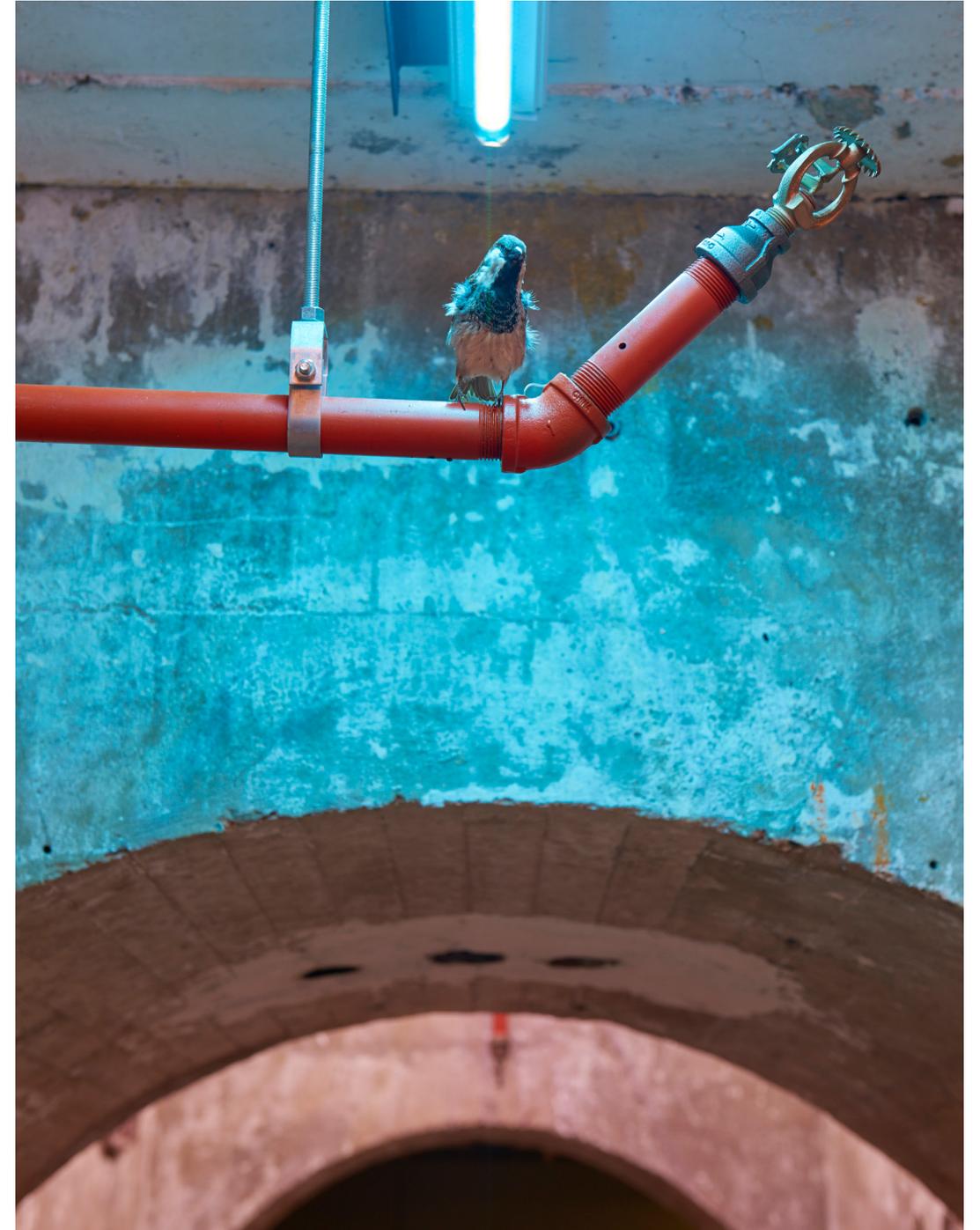
The Ball, 2016, installation view.



Delicate Cycle, 2016, performance view.



Installation view.



Sparrow on Sprinkler Pipe 1, 2016, installation view.



Birds, Dung Beetles, the Washer, 2016, installation view.



Birds, Dung Beetles, the Washer, 2016, production still.



Installation view.



Hex-Washroom, 2016, installation view.



Delicate Cycle, 2016, performance view.



Shoebox Wall Sconce (Sigerson Morrison), 2016, installation view.



Shoelightbox, 2016, installation view.



Shoelightbox, 2016, detail.

Checklist of Works in the Exhibition

Birds, Dung Beetles, the Washer, 2016
Single-channel video
20:42 minutes

D-Washroom, 2016
Wood, ceramic tiles, cement board,
aluminum edges, vent, rope, double
pulley, carabiner, headlamp, copper
pipe, slippers
90 x 60 x 36 inches
(228.6 x 152.4 x 91.4 cm)

Delicate Cycle, 2016
Performance, installation
Performances
September 18, 2016, 4:30pm;
September 24, 2016, 3pm;
October 8, 2016, 3pm;
October 22, 2016, 3pm;
November 19, 2016, 3pm;
December 17, 2016, 3pm
Duration variable

Delicate Cycle — Diagram 9.18.2016,
2016
Wood, cooking utensils, magnets,
copper pipe, ink, toothpaste
35 x 63 ½ x 3 ½ inches
(88.9 x 161.3 x 8.9 cm)

Delicate Cycle — Diagram 9.24.2016,
2016
Wood, cooking utensils, magnets,
copper pipe, ink, toothpaste
35 x 63 ½ x 3 ½ inches
(88.9 x 161.3 x 8.9 cm)

Delicate Cycle — Diagram 10.8.2016,
2016
Wood, cooking utensils, magnets,
copper pipe, ink, toothpaste
35 x 63 ½ x 3 ½ inches
(88.9 x 161.3 x 8.9 cm)

Delicate Cycle — Diagram 10.22.2016,
2016
Wood, cooking utensils, magnets,
copper pipe, ink, toothpaste
35 x 63 ½ x 3 ½ inches
(88.9 x 161.3 x 8.9 cm)

Delicate Cycle — Diagram 11.19.2016,
2016
Wood, cooking utensils, magnets,
copper pipe, ink, toothpaste
35 x 63 ½ x 3 ½ inches
(88.9 x 161.3 x 8.9 cm)

Delicate Cycle — Diagram 12.17.2016,
2016
Wood, cooking utensils, magnets,
copper pipe, ink, toothpaste
35 x 63 ½ x 3 ½ inches
(88.9 x 161.3 x 8.9 cm)

Hex-Washroom, 2016
Wood, ceramic tiles, cement board,
aluminum edges, vent, rope, double
pulley, carabiner, headlamp,
permanent marker, copper pipe,
slippers
90 x 48 x 36 inches
(228.6 x 121.9 x 91.4 cm)

Laundry Line, 2016
Clothesline, steel pipe, cotton
bed sheets
Dimensions variable

Shoelightbox (Aki Sasamoto), 2016
Shoelightbox lid, backboard of a used
laundry machine, wall sconce, LED
light bulb, push button switch
26 ½ x 32 x 5 ⅝ inches
(67.2 x 81.3 x 14.3 cm)

Shoelightbox (Francesco Benigno, 1926), 2016
Shoelightbox lid, backboard of a used
laundry machine, wall sconce, LED
light bulb, push button switch
26 x 29 x 6 ½ inches
(66 x 73.7 x 16.5 cm)

Shoelightbox (Marithé + François Girbaud), 2016
Shoelightbox lid, backboard of a used
laundry machine, wall sconce, LED
light bulb, push button switch
26 x 32 x 6 ¾ inches
(66 x 81.3 x 17.15 cm)

Shoebox Wall Sconce (No Brand), 2016
Shoebox lid, backboard of a used laundry machine, wall sconce, LED light bulb, push button switch
27 x 37 ½ x 6 ¼ inches
(68.6 x 95.3 x 15.875 cm)

Shoebox Wall Sconce (Rachel Comey), 2016
Shoebox lid, backboard of a used laundry machine, wall sconce, LED light bulb, push button switch
38 x 33 ½ x 5 ¾ inches
(96.5 x 85.1 x 14.6 cm)

Shoebox Wall Sconce (Sigerson Morrison), 2016
Shoebox lid, backboard of a used laundry machine, wall sconce, LED light bulb, push button switch
26 x 29 ¼ x 7 inches
(66 x 74.3 x 17.8 cm)

Shoebox Wall Sconce (TO BE ANNOUNCED), 2016
Shoebox lid, backboard of a used laundry machine, wall sconce, LED light bulb, push button switch
28 x 37 x 6 ⅛ inches
(71.1 x 94 x 15.6 cm)

Shoelightbox, 2016
Shoeboxes, LEDs, inkjet prints on tissue paper
Dimensions variable

Sparrow on Sprinkler Pipe 1, 2016
Taxidermy sparrow, steel pipe, fire sprinkler head, CCTV camera, monitor
Dimensions variable

Sparrow on Sprinkler Pipe 2, 2016
Taxidermy sparrow, steel pipe, fire sprinkler head, CCTV camera, monitor
Dimensions variable

The Ball, 2016
Cotton bed sheets, steel
60 inches (152.4 cm) diameter

Washboard Belt — Maidrite, 2016
Washboard, leather, metal chain, cooking utensils
Dimensions variable

Washer, 2016
Two commercial washing machines, commercial dryer, laundry cart, cotton bed sheets, sound mixer, microphone, book, slippers
Dimensions variable

Washer in the Pan, 2016
Found pan, shower speaker, audio recording
4½ x 10 x 10 inches
(11.4 x 25.4 x 25.4 cm)

Washer in the Pot 1, 2016
Found pot, shower speaker, audio recording
10 ½ x 11 ½ x 11 ½ inches
(26.7 x 29.2 x 29.2 cm)

Washer in the Pot 2, 2016
Found pot, shower speaker, audio recording
8 ½ x 11 x 11 inches
(21.6 x 27.9 x 27.9 cm)

All works courtesy the artist

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ISBN 9780997281149



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