

2022 RESIDENT FACULTY LECTURE, June 14, 2023

Abigail Deville: {applause} Hey, everyone.

Audience: Heeeey.

Deville: So, in preparing to introduce Gordon Hall's work to you, I felt it was best to use his own words. So this is an excerpt from a lecture in the symposium Rethinking German Minimalism at DIA Chelsea, New York that was on November 10, 2021.

"I love it when objects ask me to believe them. I'm reminded me of reliquaries, the ornate boxes that hold the invisible, or unverifiable pieces of bone, fabric, or hair of saints, precious because of what they claim to contain, but also precious because the box itself requests our belief. To trust in its credibility is not only to state this belief, but to put it into practice. Belief in this formulation is no longer only an intellectual process, but an aspect of perception itself. This exercise of vision as a form of belief is far more valuable to me than empirical fact in this case, because I presume it flexes a capacity that is so vital to trans and gender-nonconforming life, not just believing what people say about what is inside them, but allowing, even encouraging, that, that knowledge to shape our vision, our read of a body. A full cabinet looks different than an empty one, depending on what one believes, even while on another register it looks exactly the same. It is a troubling idea seen through the haze of our present moment's zest for misinformation, and the political and social harm caused by collective dedication to untruths. But I must defend our capacity for our perception to be shaped by our belief, because for me, and so many people like me, we know what we are looking at even when others refuse to believe it's real. When reading bodies, perception is belief."

Gordon Hall's work encompasses sculpture, performance, and writing. They are the assistant professor of art at Vassar. Before joining the faculty at Vassar, they taught Fine Arts Practice and Theory at RISD, Parson's, the New School for Design, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Sculpture and Extended Media MFA program at Virginia Commonwealth University. Gordon holds an MFA and an MA in Visual and Critical Studies from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and a BA in Philosophy and Studio Art from Hampshire College. Hall has presented solo exhibitions at EMPAC, Temple Contemporary, the Renaissance Society, the MIT List Visual Arts Center, and Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, and they have exhibited in a variety of group settings, including the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Sculpture Center, Movement Research, the Brooklyn Museum, White Columns, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and Hessel Museum at Bard College, Art in General, Abrons Art Center, Socrates Sculpture Park, the Drawing Center, David Zwirner and AIR Gallery. {laughter, applause, cheers} Woo! Alright. {laughs}

Gordon has contributed writing to a variety of books and publications, and in 2019 the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art published *Over-Beliefs: Gordon Hall Collected Writing 2011 – 2018*. Hall has been awarded residencies and grants from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts,

the Triangle Arts Association, the Jerome Foundation, the Edward F. Albee Foundation, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, ACRE, Fire Island Artists Residency, and Foundation for Contemporary Arts.

Since 2011, Hall has directed their artist project the Center for Experimental Lectures, which presents new lecture performances by artists and writers that have been presented at a variety of museums and art institutions.

Please welcome {laughing} Gordon Hall. {applause, cheering}

Gordon Hall: Thank you. {changes slide on screen; speaks as slideshow commences} I hope I can be forgiven for looking behind you into your house. I'm curious, of course, in a regular voyeuristic way, because, since March, I haven't been able to come over and look around in person, glancing into empty rooms on my slow walk to your bathroom. But, this kind of nosiness never delivers much, and here too it is something else that urges me to collect these pictures while we sit in front of our webcams, trying our best to carry on despite being unable to be in rooms together. Screengrabbing. Taking a picture of a picture, and then looking closely, tenderly even, at the background. The place from which you originate and return, which I rarely see, which it would be unprofessional for me to see in any detail. Now, unable to breathe the same air, objects take on the presence typically assigned to people. My furniture and sculptures, but also your things, as far as I can see them back there. Your bookshelf, house plant, stack of letters on the table by the door, the way the light touches your bumpy wall at this particular time of the day, on this particular day of the season. I am grabbing them. They pull me, quietly demanding my regard, distracted by vantages that are normally unavailable to me during whatever lecture, meeting, class we're determined to have anyway. Like your five-year-old that tugs on your arm while you are trying to teach from your kitchen table, these objects are the always receding background of our gathering in the impersonal spaces of classrooms, offices, lecture halls. We are far apart, of course. But, in looking behind you, I am right there.

So, that was a little book that I made during COVID, during the first year, called *Other People's Houses*. And I was trying to think through the unique modes of intimacy that were produced from working in our domestic spaces. So while there was obviously a lot of distance, I was also interested in what kinds of closeness were made possible by these ways of seeing each other. And of course I am, you know, happy and relieved to be back in person, but I also think that there was something interesting, or important, even, about the ways we got to see each other, and through the, you know, the altered forms of proximity that occur when our lives are mediated by the digital. So seeing each other in our bedrooms and our kitchens was, I think, a much-needed reminder that our backgrounds, our points of origins, shape the ways we show up in non-domestic space in lots of crucial ways.

So I'm gonna present my work today in three sections. First I'm gonna give a broad overview of my sculptural and performance practice, and I'm gonna be showing quite a few images of my work as I speak, but I'm not gonna be talking about them directly, so if you have questions, please remember them for the end. And then after this I'm gonna share a more detailed account of two exhibitions, one from 2018 and one from just last year, and

this more recent show I'm gonna also use as a way of talking about some of the things I'm working on right now, while I'm here.

So, I spend my time thinking about our bodies' relationships with objects. And I make my sculptures as a way to examine our embodied relationships with things, particularly things that we use, trying to unfurl the social, emotional, sexual, political aspects of our lives as bodies. While sculpture-making is at the center of my work, I also explore these questions in performance, critical writing, event organizing, and I have a special interest in creative modes of public speaking, including a curatorial project that Abigail mentioned that I've been working on for the last eleven years, called the Center for Experimental Lectures. And I'm not gonna be talking about it a lot in this lecture, but I'm happy to chat about it more in general.

That said, I've never been particularly concerned about the disciplinary distinctions between art-making, writing, research, performance, public speaking, event organizing. I think of them all just as forms of making, and I think of them all as things we do with our bodies, just as reading or speaking words are also material practices. Perhaps it is correct to say that I am simply a sculptor, because no matter what kind of work I'm doing, I'm understanding myself as a body in physical and spatial relationships with other bodies and things, either in analogue or virtual space. (00:10:04) I came to sculpture from a background in dance, and what I learned as a dancer has profoundly influenced the way I think about my body and how I approach object-making. My sculptures emerge from the world of furniture, and exist at the scale of furniture, so, largely under waist height, and they are periodically put to use in performances that are both choreographed or improvised, using my own body and the bodies of other performers in my work. I make objects that I design, and also objects that are exact replicas of pieces of found furniture, and in doing that I'm pursuing a kind of intimacy that I can have with a thing through getting to know it well enough to remake it.

Sculpturally, I am particularly interested in furniture because of the ways that furniture and furniture-like objects request or conjure bodies, even when none are present, like a chair asks for a butt, and a handle asks for a hand, or a step asks for a foot. My objects make these requests while also, I hope, troubling our efforts to definitively read them. I try to make things that are this and this, and this, and that refuse to arrive fully on any single identity. In this way, I could describe them as, you know, both recognizable but also unrecognizable, or strange, and, which is, you know, similar to how I think about my own body. My objects are sometimes my proxies, and sometimes my companions, and either way, making them is for me a method of imagining bodies differently. I'm excited about objects' capacities to be of use, especially when these uses are unconventional, unexpected, or merely imagined. Insofar as my objects are often used in performance, it's [WORD UNCLEAR] that they could be described as props, though this term has always felt like the wrong term, because what I'm really seeking is to respond to the requests of my objects with my body existing as a thing among them, and acting in response to their needs. I make them first, and then I listen to what they ask for, or what should happen on or with or among them. It's possible that what I'm doing is actually maybe a reversal of the conventional relationship between performers and props, as in some sense my objects are

the primary actors, and I and my fellow performers are supporting them, or becoming maybe their props. For example, like, if the script of a stage play requires a character to sit, a chair would be gotten, you know, to make that possible. In the world of my work, the chair would come first, and then the action would be determined from there. So I'm making things, and then I'm asking them what they want from me, and from us.

I'm equally invested in particularity and specificity as I am in abstraction, opacity, and strategies of refusal. And I view these two seemingly opposed approaches as congruent within the world of my work, making what I have sometimes described as my extremely precise objects of ambiguous use. For me, abstraction has been a method of refusing demands of legibility, while also orienting myself toward an as-yet nonexistent but desperately needed future, trying to speak now in a tomorrow language, even if I can't yet fully understand what I'm saying. In this way, my work's always trying to bring me to a potential but not yet knowable place. A gesture of pointing towards where such a horizon might exist. Also, I, I reject kind of a, you know, an orthodoxy that would assert that abstraction and representation exist in distinct spheres. I want both, and I am particularly excited about making groups of sculptures that contain a spectrum of more and less identifiable forms. Like, how is an identifiable object changed when it is next to an unnamable abstract form? Or, how do we re-read an unidentifiable formal abstraction when it is adjacent to something as familiar as a chair? I think that these kinds of object relations across degrees of legibility can trouble our practices of reading, and can ask us to meet the things where they are in how they want to be looked at together.

While my work emerges from my lived experiences as a gender different person, within a community of people who also challenge, you know, norms for categorizing human bodies, I have been very cautious about how my trans identity becomes visible in my work, or in its public framing. I am motivated both by an understanding of identity as complex and layered and always shifting, as well as a skepticism about the, you know, representation and inclusion as being the primary way that art institutions relate to non-cisgender and non-white artists. I believe museums must pursue real diversity, and equity, and they have to do this without tokenizing artists of non-normative identity categories. So, in other words, I don't appreciate being used as an example of my type.

I flesh out some of these ideas further in an essay I wrote recently, a polemic, *Why I Don't Talk About The Body*, and then also – and this is perhaps more important than any of that, is just, I make the work with the intent that it's a resource for anyone who's seeking to complicate processes of reading bodies, whether in relation to gender, or race, or ability, or other forms of bodily difference. And in this way, my work's rooted in my lived experience, but made as a resource for other people who perhaps don't share my lived experience.

My work is based on the belief that objects can teach us how to see other objects, and how to see our own and one another's bodies. I make things that can help me re-train my own perception towards slower, more nuanced practices of reading that can accommodate high levels of unknowing. I believe artmaking, at its core, is a rigorous and committed practice of learning to know the world differently. And this involves cultivating one's ability to unknow and re-know by rejecting normative modes of seeing and doing. I

think that artist utilize a special combination of, like, thinking and doing, research and making, so that we ask questions, and then we manifest the ideas like, physically in the shared world.

Practically speaking, I make work out of concrete, casting it into forms often with pigment mixed in to create numerous different colors of concrete. I make sculptures out of wood, sanded and waxed, or carved, or colored in with colored pencil. And most recently, I made a wood sculpture that was adorned with thousands of silver nail heads, which I'm gonna talk more about towards the end.

I make sculptures out of hand-dyed folded shirt fabric, painted tile mosaic, carved brick, and semi-transparent pencil drawings on appear on the floor, usually in the shape of doors. Or, more recently, a pair of pants. {laughter} And then I also most recently made a bathroom sash, this was on drawing paper, and I'm gonna talk more about the pants and the sash later as well. (00:19:59) I also recently made my first cast metal sculpture, this brass shim, who's also gonna come back. I make the sculptures in groups for exhibitions, thinking of them as both individual discrete objects, and innate groups. Even kin with one another. After their initial presentation together, they are often separated to be exhibited independently, though, like a family, they will always be connected to their original group. Like songs in an album, or essays in a book of essays.

My body and the bodies of my performers enter into these groupings as equal members, a difference in degree, and not in type. One of my investments as an artist and a person is to pose an ongoing question about the pleasures and risks of allowing oneself to feel like or become an object, and what it means to be objectified in both destructive and reparative ways. I have found that being a thing among the family of my things has helped me transform some of my own traumatic experiences of, you know, non-consensual objectification, and then I've been able to extend that experience at times also to the performers in my work, through the process of working with them. I've explored these ideas about traumatic and reparative objectification in my writing in a variety of ways, including thinking about the role of queer nightlife as a context in which we can appear in our full objectness for one another, embracing rather than disavowing our fundamental bodiness. I start from the assertion that there is no me that is not my body, and a vul – which is, a vulnerability which opens up a vast array of pleasures, dangers, and physical, like, self-transformations.

Some of my exhibitions include performance, and others do not, a balance which feels important to me because of the ways that the possibility of performance shapes how we view so-called static objects. I'm interested in how the way we look at an object is shifted when we know that something can or did or might be done with it. The possibility of performance always keeps open the question of use, inviting a viewer to see a sculpture and ask, what is this for? Or, how would I use this? The posing of these questions is equally important as the performances themselves. The question remains active even in my exhibitions that are just sculpture, because I find that the mere knowledge that I work with living, moving bodies influences how people read the sculptures. Which, whether there is performance or not, are always complete, even when their uses are not displayed publicly.

My performances happen in the space of the exhibition, just once or twice during the run of a long show, or interspersed throughout the day at unannounced times. I've started working exclusively in this way, making subtle or short unscheduled performances that take place randomly for whomever happens to be in the exhibition at that time. The crowd-attracting spectacles that are often created by performance in contemporary art context are not a good match for the ethics and politics of what I'm trying to do, and I've found that these intermittent accidental moments of witnessing moving bodies allows for a kind of small scale quiet intimacy between objects and performers and audiences.

I've also explored even more ephemeral modes of performance, like somebody driving up outside the museum with music playing loudly in their car, or the daily melting of this can-shaped ice cube on the sidewalk in front of the gallery. I never show documentation of the performances within the exhibition itself, as I'm more compelled by rumors that something could or might happen with the objects than I am with seeing what did happen reproduced after the fact in the space itself.

I'm particularly compelled by moments of touch between objects and bodies, particularly hands and feet. And I've made a series of works that are specifically focused on tactility and handheldness, as modes of knowing the world. This interest in the handheld relates to the investment in the handmade qualities of my work, which I think of as evidence of the time that we spent together as I made them, pressed up against my own body. When I'm working on an exhibition, I try to think about what kind of space it will be to be in. I think about shows as a place to spend time, that people come to spend time, and I ask myself what kind of time I wanna offer the people who come. I try to make a mix of things, maybe slices of a variety of other places. A public pool, or an auto mechanic waiting room, or a nightclub, or a church, or a hillside with a good view. I suppose I'm trying to combine elements of all of these, the languid voyeurism of the pool, the uns – excuse me, the suspended blurred time of the waiting room, the embodied homosocial and less linguistic space of the nightclub, the extreme object-oriented specificity of the religious site, and the expansive introspection of the hillside view. The activities that take place in these spaces are, in a sense, useless, or, useful only for purposes that are in themselves hard to account for in conventional ways. It is this particular useful uselessness that I'm interested in creating as a place in the exhibition.

As I mentioned, writing has been an important part of my artistic practice, both in the form of texts that are incorporated in the work itself, like performance scripts and a letter that I'm gonna share with you shortly, and also in critical writing about other artists' work. And, as Abigail mentioned, the first seven years of my writing were collected into a book that was released in conjunction with my solo show at PICA, called *Over-Beliefs*, and Sarah Workneh wrote a beautiful introduction for it. And the essay that you heard the excerpt from was about the German sculptor and paintee, and, ugh, the German sculptor and painter Imi Knoebel's work, called *250,000 Drawings*, which I presented at Dia and then released as this PDF. And the, the essay, "On Closed Boxes," uses Knoebel's sculpture of five closed and locked cabinets that are, ostensibly, filled with drawings, to analyze the figure of the closed box in a variety of ways, thinking about the closed box as a request for belief, as a

resource for subcultural community, as a model for some kinds of political refusal, and the eternally offered if unrealized possibility of change – closed boxes are openable, even if they are not opened – that is so necessary for living in the present.

This kind of critical writing has been an important context for my creative energy, and has helped me sort out my own ideas and commitments, spending time thinking about other artists and works of arts that I love, and it's also enabled me to some degree to set the terms of engagement with my own work, or set the terms of engagement around my own work, which has helped, I think, for it to find its audience and also allowed me to contribute to, you know, existing ongoing conversations around sculpture, gender, abstraction, art history, the power of objects to teach us ways of being in the world.

Both my writing and my sculptures and my performances are based in a deeply felt critique of the shortcomings of the present, by imagining another system of feeling and seeing, by making it come into being now, even if it just in the very limited world of my work. So, in some ways, the practice is quite optimistic, and in other ways it's like, deeply disappointed.

So what I'd like to do now is talk to you about my solo exhibition at the MIT List Visual Arts Center, called *The Number of Inches Between Them*. (00:30:01) In the years preceding this project, I'd made a series of sculptures that involved the creation of replicas of various found objects. That was the ceramics stool here at Skowhegan that I stole, but then sent a similar heightened other stool back, so they were not short a stool. {laughter} The objects that I was making replicas of are, were, are almost always furniture, smallish, handmade one-of-a-kind pieces of furniture that come into my life in accidental ways. I think about this process of replication as an expression of attraction to an object, a sort of recuperative getting to know through making, akin to the desire to become familiar with the body of someone you like or love. By reproducing the design of a thing exactly, I am able to get to know it in an intimate and physical way.

So I encountered this bench first as a photograph, and started this project with the intent to make a replica of it, understanding it to be a bench, and not an artwork. That's Rollo, my dog who you will meet soon, on Saturday. {laughter} When I went to go see it where it sits in rural New Jersey, in my friend's parents' yard, this intention got much more complicated for reasons which I will explain in a moment. First I'll just walk you through the elements of the exhibition, and then I'm gonna fill in the gaps by reading you a letter that was part of the sh, the body of work.

So, the show had five elements: two sculptures, so, one, two. One wood bench, which sort of was and wasn't part of the work, but it was made specially for the show, and it was the same height as the bench itself, so when you sat on it, you were like, perfectly lined up. A stack of posters, and a performance for five people, myself and four queer elders living in Boston, that occurred just once through the run of the show.

So what I want to do now before I say anything else is to share with you the letter that's on the reverse side of this poster. The posters were in this two-and-a-half-inch thick

stack, which is the same thickness as the panels in the bench itself, and viewers to the show would pick up a poster, usually on their way in, and they would often read it in the space with the sculptures, sitting on the wood bench, usually. Experiencing this takes about seven minutes, and I'm gonna exit Keynote and open Preview so you can read along with me. I'm sharing the text with you in its entirety both because it's a vital part of this project, but also because it's a central example of the role writing plays in my practice, not just as a mode of explanation, but as integral to the work itself. And the letter also fleshes out many of the foundational motivating ideas in my work, particularly around embodied learning, and vulnerability, care, and support. So, you know, sometimes I make things with concrete and wood, and other times I make things with words.

"April 2, 2018

Dear Dennis,

I didn't come looking for you, I just loved your bench. I saw it in a photograph and asked my friend if I could in person to her grandparent's yard to see it. Cracked and aging, you bench sat at the edge of the grass surrounded by fall leaves. As I walked up to I knew right away that I needed to get to know it better. I measured every length and angle, trying to understand it from all sides, the ways the parts fit together to make the whole. It wasn't until afterward I learned that this beautiful and strange piece of outdoor furniture was made by an artist, that you had made it. I worked to piece together what I could of the events of your life and your death, trying to find out what I could from the people who are still alive to remember.

As you know, your bench is made of eight brownstone panels, two and a half inches thick, that fit together vertically and horizontally to make it, its legs, seat, and back. I decided to reconstruct your bench, twice. I made two of each panel, casting them in concrete in my studio with white Portland cement and extra-fine white sand. Some of the shapes make sense – a triangle, a square, a parallelogram – while others are irregular and unpredictable, nearly impossible to memorize with accuracy. Of my sixteen panels, I made eight of them in the lightest pink and assembled them together into a bench the way you did. The other eight panels I kept distinct and disassembled, leaning them on the walls in a row. The eight shapes range in weight from 45 pounds (the small triangle) to 320 pounds (the seat), and when trying to apprehend what these calculated numbers mean, I found myself comparing them to people – the anonymity and specificity of these numbers reminding me of the bodies of children and adults of various sizes – 45 pounds, 75 pounds, 76 pounds, 90 pounds, 107 pounds, 209 pounds, 282 pounds, 320 pounds. Could I pick up the body of a person of this size? When I mix up the liquid concrete and pour it into the molds, it takes three days for the liquid to cure into a solid. I cover the just-poured panel with a blanket, and when I come back to my studio a day later, the curing concrete is hot like a sleeping body, a puff of warm humid air released into my face when I fold back the blanket to check on it. Another day and a half later it is cold to the touch, rock hard and dead weight. It lets off a musty odor for another two weeks as it fully hardens.

I can't deadlift a 100-pound bag of sand or cement, but if I slide it to one side at a time out of my car and onto a cart I can get it into the freight elevator and up to the studio on my own, just barely. I slice the bags open and scoop the materials out into the mixing

bucket a pound at a time, mixing in the water and then decanting the hundreds of pounds of liquid concrete a 2-quart-bucket at a time into the lubed-up wood mold I've prepared. Once the concrete is solid, I need help with every aspect of making this work. I can lift only the smallest panel, the triangle, on my own; I have need help – I have needed help getting all the others up and out of their molds, turning them over to sand the edges on the other sides, wrapping them, moving them, unwrapping them again. A friend of mine exclaimed to me while helping me lift one – “This is both very heavy and extremely fragile!” The bench cannot be assembled without a team of seven people, three of whom lay the 320-pound seat down onto the legs that the other three simultaneously shift into the precisely the right locations to align the notches on its underside, allowing it all to snap together into a usable piece of furniture. These people not only need to be strong enough to lift the concrete panels, but also need to work together as a collective body to negotiate the task to assembling it. I've lost count of how many people helped me make this work. Many of them were paid for their help lifting and moving, while others offered their assistance freely – friends, my boyfriend, members of my family.

I am told that you were small – taller than me though, and probably stronger, wiry. Who helped you with your bench? I wish I could ask you how you designed it, which shape you drew first and how you figured out how to fit them all together. The original paperwork is gone, but it is seeming like – and it is seeming like I will never know the exact year you made it, although it is not unlikely that it was 1983, the same year I was born, 34 years after you were, both in Massachusetts, just miles apart. If this was the year you made your bench, that would mean that you were the same age that I am now, and that you had only six more years to live, although you would have no way of knowing that at the time. You didn't even have your diagnosis for another couple of years, and even then it was not understood what was happening. I can't tell if the square panel that is now leaning on the long vertical panel in the back is where you originally had it, or if it was somewhere else and broke off and was leaned there temporarily, and eventually permanently. I have reproduced the design as I found it. I wish I could ask you if I have it right. (00:40:00)

When your bench was finished, did you look at it and feel how I feel? When the parts slide into each other and held each other up, did you think it was beautiful? Satisfying? The way it fits together, I feel it in my whole body. It reminds of the time I went to the Noguchi Museum and felt overwhelmed by the sexuality of the interlocking stone pieces, confused at getting so aroused from looking at abstract sculpture. Wondering if other people feel this too. Did you sit down on your bench? Did you lie on it and let your arms and legs hang down off the sides? I've devised a dance in which I touch every surface of it with my body, draping myself over and around it in one pose after another while everybody watches.

Did you know that if you lean all the panels individually against the wall in a row they look like an as-yet-unknown alphabet? Like something to try to read, but you can't make out the letters. The way an A is a triangle, but getting more complicated from there. I wonder if you ever had them arranged that way, when they were waiting to be moved perhaps, 1,200 pounds of abstract characters, written to a distant future or past time.

I've sometimes morbidly joked to friends that I became a sculptor in order to make my death a maximum pain in the ass for everyone who cares about me. {laughter} What to do with all these heavy objects? I'll be direct – there is very little left of you. There are a few images of your works, a couple of press clippings, one other outdoor sculpture, and the memories of your friends, who told me what they could about you as best they could. There were some questions I couldn't ask. They advised me not to try to find your sister. So many people didn't live through it; I can guess that other people you knew also didn't make it, and I can't call them up to ask about you. What room did you spend your last days in? What furniture held your body? How did it feel to be so reliant? I hope this letter reaches you. Your bench came to me just when I needed it, and I really hope you're alright with my reconstructions of it. I have loved getting to know it, and you, and the way all the parts fit together."

So, the bench was not an anonymous piece of furniture at all, but an artwork made by a largely unknown artist named Dennis Croteau, sometime in the early '80s before his death from complications related to AIDS in 1989. And so this project that started out as a journey to intimately get to know this strange and enigmatic object also became one of learning about the life of Dennis, through his friends and the research that I was able to do about him. Dennis was one of the thousands of people, so many of whom were artists, who were lost to the AIDS crisis, and whose lives have been mostly forgotten.

Unearthing Dennis Croteau's story through his bench has been a way, for me, of grieving this history that unfolded when I was just a child. Further, the loss caused by AIDS has shaped our lives in so many ways, including in terms of what artists went on to be canonized. And what art historians and critics lived to tell the tale, and to be our teachers and mentors. I have an ongoing research interest in the skewed story that we've been told about minimalism, and abstraction more generally, as the purview of only white straight cisgender men. And I have wondered if the more complex story of abstraction and identity has been lost partly because of the voices missing as a result of the AIDS crisis. I developed this project over a couple of years, following the 2016 election of the Trump administration. Many artists found this time to be a very difficult one in which to work, unable to ethically justify spending time in the studio. For me, that was not the case, and it has been the same during the crisis of this pandemic, in which grief and uncertainty have felt like the exact context for which my work is best suited.

During the first year of the Trump administration, while I was working on *The Number of Inches Between Them*, Congress was attempting to repeal the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, which was, is, the most progressive program of health insurance ever enacted in the US. I kept hearing politicians say, 'If you get sick, you'll need health insurance.' This word 'if' really hung in my ears, like, if you get sick, and not when, a suggestion that illness and disability were exceptions, and not facts of all lives. I was already asking myself questions about what kind of responsibilities we have to each other, physically, symbolically, societally, in terms of supporting each other. The intimacy I established with Dennis' bench became a way of reflecting on support while physically making an object of support. A bench. And the heaviness of the object, the concrete pieces, became an embodied practice of my own vulnerability, and need for support from others,

as I articulated in the letter of my descriptions of relying so much on the help of other people to realize the work. And despite my struggle with it, making the sculpture, in a way, like, forced me to contend with my own sense of vulnerability and interdependence that I thought I was trying to illustrate for other people, challenging my consciously disavowed but clearly very still present sense of myself as independent, autonomous.

The project subsequently produced this book, with several critical essays about the project, and a transcript of an interview between myself and the art historian David Getsy [?], who wrote a book called *Abstract Bodies: 1960s Sculpture and the Expanded Field of Gender*, which is a text that reads abstract sculpture through a trans studies lens, which has been a theoretical and art historical touchstone for me. David Getsy, who was one of my mentors in graduate school, was also the person who introduced me to the work of Scott Burton, who is known primarily for his work from the '80s that the shape of stone and cast concrete public seats and benches. You might recognize these. Which he produced many of very rapidly in the '80s before he passed away from complications related to AIDS, also in 1989.

There's a lot I can say about Scott Burton, about the amazing and generous and perverse ways he thought about offering his works for people to sit on. And about the ways his work has been, I think, overlooked in the history of post-minimalism. But, for another day. At any rate, the stone chair works – before the stone chair works, Burton made a series of three performance works in the '70s called the *Behavior Tableau Performances*. In these performances, groups or individual performers moved in silent slow motion, sometimes naked, sometimes clothed, often wearing platform shoes, on and around in relation to furniture. And the audience was made to sit like {laughing} eighty feet away from the performance, so not only was this thing extremely silent, and very slow, and very long, it was also really quite far away. And then the chairs of the audience, a little like now, maybe even closer, were all put very, right next to each other, so your shoulder or your leg might, you know, touch the person next to you in the audience. And this was all {laughing} part of this work for him. So there's this potentially awkward accidental touching. And then in interviews from the period, someone asked Burton what his intention was in organizing the audience for his performances in this way. And his answer was, quote, "In the *Behavior Tableau*, what I want people to become aware of is the emotional nature of the number of inches between them." So, he was talking about these inches. So, that is where the title *The Number of Inches Between Them* came from. And it just leapt off the page as a way of talking about, you know, the physical and symbolic space between people, but also the use of measuring in the work itself, all of the measurements of the bench, and the way the pieces all fit together, and the way it relates to the other objects that are lined up against the wall, and the distances between them, etcetera.

Most recently, this new sculpture emerged from *The Number of Inches Between Them*, a cast brass shim that reproduces the uniquely shaped custom-made wooden shim fabricated specifically to install my recreation of Dennis' bench on an uneven floor, there. So this brass piece, called *Shim: The Number of Inches Between Them*, carried this project forward into a new body of work. (00:50:09) Undergoing yet another process of replication, what I like to think of as like a phase chase, starting in wood and finishing in

brass. The brass shim was part of a solo show I did in 2021, and so this is some of the work that I made during COVID lockdown, which, during which I was still able to go to my studio, thankfully. So what I want to do now is show you a few of the other works in this show, that this shim was part of. And then I'm gonna kinda use them to unpack some specific threads in the work more generally.

So, I had fun working on this show, kind of a new thing. It had three separate rooms, interconnected separate rooms, and so I was able to arrange the work into these separate groupings, that was kind of new, and I felt like each room was distinct. So the title of the exhibition, it was called *End of Day*, and, you know, that phrase is primarily used to indicate the end of day of stock market trading, so, quite relevant to, you know, what was happening in February, March of 2020. But I think I was also using the term end of day to think more generally about the time of day of returning home, and maybe as a way of imagining kind of a dream life, like, less consumed with constant work and endless circulation and not focused on public display. And the group of sculptures in this show really came out of thinking about those intimate relationships we have with our most familiar inanimate companions, the furniture we live on, around, and with.

So, the first work is the U-stool. So, it's a pigmented, concrete Helvetica uppercase U, which is cast at the scale of a usable stool. It rocks back and forth a little bit when you sit on it. And I put it right in front of, right in the front of the show, so it's the first thing you see from the hall, and sort of an interpolation, like, you, speaking directly to the person as they pass through the doors. This kind of thing, like, where things go, I always spend as much time as I am allowed to arranging the locations of the works in the show, both in relationship to each other and in relation to the room itself. I really think that a show is the things in it, but also the space in between the things. And I think a lot about, for the viewer, like, the temporality of moving through the room. So what you see first, and second, and third, and then, like, you know, the backsides of things when you leave, etcetera. I think of the U sculpture as part of my ongoing interest in the material aspects of language and letterforms, as in this work that was called *And Per Se And*, which I thought of as sort of like an object alphabet that I arranged, and re-arranged into various words and sentences, in conjunction with a performance script that I wrote for the group of sculptures. Or this performance work, called *Holding the Room as an Aside*, in which I made a pair of parentheses, wood parentheses, that enabled me to be the word inside the parentheses if I chose to stand in between them. And the interest, you know, my interest in the materiality of language is also part of what has motivated my work on the *Center for Experimental Lectures*, in which I commission works from other artists and writers that takes the situation of the public lecture as the raw material for making new work. The gathering of bodies in an audience to hear a speaker is about so much more than the information being presented.

So this work, *Companion Stool*, also pigmented cast concrete, is a companion to the U, which is something I tend toward, making works that are like a pair, even though they're also separate sculptures. I think of it as kind of like a footstool, or a book rest, or something I could like lay my torso over. It's definitely in conversation with the slant step, which, for those of you who aren't familiar with this object, it was bought at a thrift store in Berkeley,

California in the late '60s by the painter William Wylie, who was working for Bruce Naumann, and it kind of became like a culty artist obsession over the decades, lots of shows and books and Naumann has several works about it. So I've written about the slant step as a way of thinking about the capacity for our relationships with objects with ambiguous functions to invite, you know, more open ways of seeing and reading objects and bodies.

The show has two closed boxes, this one, called *Closed Box, Grey and Blue*, and this negative space box. The first one is painted cast concrete with pigmented concrete inlays, this is like sculpture nerdery, but the blue dots are not painted, they're separate pieces of concrete that are cast into the lid. So they're like, they feel like buttons, kind of. And then the negative space box, top and bottom separate, pigmented cast concrete, like a milk crate cage, the size of a shoebox for boots. Okay.

So, these two are another kind of pair. They lean to the same height on adjacent walls. *Leaning Back (1)*, *Leaning Back (2)*. And they, they're both organized around their backs. As in, the sides that face the wall. So, this one is two separate pieces of pigmented cast concrete, balancing one on the other, and that's an important thing, I never have, like, hidden hardware – if something stands up, it has to stand up on its own. The back of – hard to see, but the back of the bottom piece is painted bright orange, so the shadow on the wall is orange. And so you can't see the surface, but you can see it as this reflection, and this is something that I've played with on, off and on over the years. Green shadow, purple shadow. And there's a poetics in this that has felt important, like, something that faces away from you but reveals itself through its reflection. That, it both, you know, inviting and preventing you from seeing it directly. And then the second *Leaning Back* is this elongated Shaker chair back, and the back is painted a dark opaque gray, sort of like the shadow on the wall is coming off the wall and, like, holding onto the chair.

The show that I'm working on now, while I'm here, is called *Turn Back* and it sort of revolves around this photograph of this concrete garden lion, appearing facing away from you. And it appears in the show as a photograph, my first photograph, which is rubbed onto the wall with a transfer. And also, this is the original, but a replica is being made of this lion, who will face away from you in this way. And the title, it's a little bit like the U, except that when you walk up to the gallery, it will say "turn back." So it's also sort of instructing. Instructing {laughing} you to turn around. Okay.

This is one of the *Folds*, hand-dyed shirt fabric, long strips folded together. All of the dyed fabric works share this, they are, you know, folded, but could be unfolded, and sort of only provisionally, like, in the arrangement that they're in.

Okay, so here we are now in the second room, and right away underfoot is this balsa wood block, covered in colored pencil and perforated with tiny holes, called *Perforated Drawing*. I started making these small floor works about ten years ago, and at the time it felt kind of like a breakthrough for me to make something so small and diminutive and, you know, unmonumental. I initially was making them in response to invitations to be in group shows, a kind of intuitive rejection of the kind of, like, competition for attention that takes place in these environments, you know, like, work work work work. (01:00:02) So I

thought of them as making something sort of overlookable that would go underneath other people's more interesting art. {laughs} It's a bit self-deprecating, but, seriously, I am, I'm always trying to figure out how to make objects that can feel important without being physically large. Not wanting to, like, participate in the kind of economy of scale that equates size or, you know, size with power, or size with loudness. So on that note, this is *Hovering Dot*, from the *End of Day* show. Pigmented cast concrete on these houseplant riser feet. The part of the room that I'm always thinking the most about is like the five or so inches above the floor, which I suppose is like the place where the infrastructure of the the world meets and supports or doesn't support us.

I blame COVID for this. Colored pencil on cast concrete, made from a custom turned table leg. Polka dots, obviously. Very maximalist. {laughter} I think I was having fun {laughter}, you know, with the time I suddenly had, and also I thought there was something funny about drawing the dots onto the bulges of the legs like this. And I'm actually using the wooden leg that I got to make the mold for the, those legs, right now for one of the sculptures in "Turn Back," so it's covered in graphite, and it'll be on the ground with some beads that go up to the ceiling. Different. I usually title one work in the show like, after the title of the show, so, most of the titles, as you can tell, are pretty un, you know, uneventful, but one of them usually has the title of the show, so this one's called *End of Day*, and I give that, the show title to the piece that's kind of like the root or the heart or the first thing, or, you know, the piece that, I mean that is like, the piece that holds the thing together for you. So this is a replica of a found clothes valet, and it's entirely studded with these sanded nail heads, so it gives it this kind of coat of armor, studs, bedazzles. This was the most time intensive thing {laughing} I think I've made, cause each nail had to be individually glued into a pre-drilled hole, and then sanded. Obviously, it's frustrating, sometimes, when I'm working on something like this, but I keep coming back to these kinds of work-over surfaces, whether with the mosaic, or the colored pencil things, or this piece that I'm currently working on for "Turn Back," which is a replica – you remember these shoe trying-on stools? So I made this one. And it's getting covered in ballpoint pen. So that's also what I'm doing here, if you wonder where I am, I'm probably up there, like {laughter} – come visit me! {laughs} I guess it, you know, maybe it's a fanatical coloring in, like, from when I was a kid. Anyway.

So, *Sash*. This is just colored pencil and drawing paper. With this wood peg. And the pants. Colored pencil and graphite on both sides of tracing vellum, and that gets put directly onto the floor. To scale, my pants. And *Sash*, this was fun, it was made into an edition of fifty for Printed Matter. So, they scanned it and screenprinted it, and then it mails in these little boxes all wrapped up around the peg. So, fifty people out there have this in their house. Other people's houses, makes me happy.

{laughs} Okay. This is the biggest piece in this show, *Five Part Bench*, all pigmented cast concrete. More sculpture nerding out, I figured out how to cast draped fabric, which I'd be happy to talk about, it was really exciting. So I used the solid draped fabric base to like sort of hold up these art deco columns, and then the top is kind of a, like my take on a municipal bench design that often, you know, have these lumps. They call it defensive

design, also known as hostile architecture. But my lumps are, like, a little perverted maybe. You can sit next to them, or on them.

And then the third room was pretty small. The pants, the box, and the graphite-covered leg. So, a cast concrete table leg with a ball and claw foot, just rubbed with a graphite stick. It just leans against the wall. You might have noticed ball and claw furniture feet keep resurfacing for me, and I just, I don't know, I love them for a bunch of reasons. This sort of moment of holding onto the physical world, like, caring for it, grasping onto it, the way you hold your phone, like – the ball and claw is, in a way, like, the symbolic encapsulation of the moment of touch between bodies and the world. And then there's also this, like, fantastic trans weirdness of having this foot, which is already a combination of a bird and a lion, or a horse, or other mammal, and then on the legs of tables and chairs. So, you know, substituting a table leg for an animal leg, very weird and funny to me. I was also very shy as a kid, and I spent a lot of time under the table, and my house was filled with Queen Anne style furniture that my dad's Jewish parents had like hired decorators to like make them look whiter, so they had all this Queen Anne-style furniture, anyway, and my parents inherited, so often I'd be like under there and suddenly face to face with a ball and claw foot.

Okay. I'm very close to the end here. So the gallery had this kind of hallway in the back, and I decided to like, add one final work to the show that kind of was and wasn't part of the show, but it was a, kind of an experiment, and I wanted to try it, so I put it back there. So, it was a projected photograph, also new, a projected photograph of a Thorne miniature room. Are people familiar with the Thorne miniature rooms? So, if you have seen them, you know, but if you haven't, they're on permanent view at the Art Institute of Chicago, and they're these incredibly intricate miniature period rooms that were commissioned by this quirky wealthy lady named Narcissa Thorne. And there was just one Thorne miniature room that was contemporary to its production, so this one, that was called *California Hallway ca. 1940*. And she hated contemporary design, she called it "packing box furniture," but she fully committed to – oh yeah, so, for scale. Let's see. She fully committed to creating this hallway, and she commissioned, like, a tiny Léger painting, and the other painting's by Amadée Ozenfant, and there's pottery by {laughing} Gertrude Natzler. So, I projected the picture of the miniature room, here, at actual size, so, seventeen and a half by like thirteen and a half inches, and I titled it *Thorne Miniature Room California Hallway ca. 1940 Projected at Actual Size*. So that a viewer who initially thought they were looking at a small image of a human-sized room would find out from the title that they were in fact looking at a life-size image {laughing} of a miniature room. And I {laughter} – yeah, it was a joke. I was hoping to, this kind of disorienting thing of experiencing scale and especially, I suppose, in relation to the very idiosyncratic ways we perceive scale in interior domestic spaces, or in our own bodies. The artist statement for my undergraduate thesis was about how your tongue feels really huge {laughing} inside your mouth. {laughter}

The other thing about this, which I'll admit was a bit of a happy accident, was that projecting a still photograph with a video projector produced this kind of perpetual sense that somebody was about to enter the hallway, or had just left the hallway, and that feeling, like being alone in a quiet, still room of objects that could be the site of potential action, is

one that I'm always trying to create, like, in the exhibition itself. So, the projection, which in some ways was like a divergence, felt like a new way to get at this. And so I'm working on a piece now, here, where I'm trying to, it will be part of "Turn Back," and I'm trying to kind of recreate this shaft of light that comes into my studio at 4 o'clock – that's also Rollo. So this is a very early test, but it will move so slowly it will be as if it's still. But, occasionally, it will be shifting across the room of the gallery. So I'm trying to get at this thing of wondering whether the thing you're looking at is still or moving, in a different way. (01:10:22)

So, out of this show came a little book, that I commissioned responses to the works from artist friends and curators and writers, and we presented them in a live event, and also made this book, and the texts and the images were paired in this way. And I want to wrap up by just reading you a short excerpt of the introduction that I wrote for this book.

"'End of Day' is a show of sculptures, and people are often curious if this or that particular work has a corresponding performance. As in, is this for a performance? Or, is this for a performance? The question makes sense, since my sculptures are often performed on or with or around, and I think of them as objects of use, even with that use is only proposed, and never realized. In this instance, the answer to that question is no. As far as I know, I won't be arranging public actions with these works for my or other people's bodies. This is partly in response to the limitations of COVID, but also because, for whatever reason, I don't feel like this show requests it. But, this decision about performance has never felt like a big one to make, and I'll confess I am sometimes puzzled because this distinction between performance/no performance somehow feels less significant to me than it does, than it seems to feel to others. What does it mean for an object to perform? What is the difference between imagining a body doing something and seeing a body doing something?

I think that what I'm really after is the sense that sculptures can do things. Sometimes be used in a performance, sometimes be leaned against a wall, sometimes speak to each other, sometimes propose a way of seeing, conjure a set of feelings, or uncover a distant memory. Are these all not also uses? Can they be thought of as performances?

When I invited the contributors to this book, called *Circling the Square* to participate I described the invitation to them in the following way: when I make performances in my work, I make the movement in response to the sculptures. I make the objects first, and then I watch them and listen to them, trying to hear what they want to happen [WORD UNCLEAR] our bodies, on or around them. I am thinking of these texts the same way. They are not meant to be primarily about the objects, though analysis can certainly play some role, if you want it to. Rather, they use the work as a point of departure for thinking and speaking. You are writing from, or to, or with, or because of your chosen object. What do these sculptures propose?

In this way, these texts attempt to answer the objects in the same way I offer, I often answer them with moving bodies. Sometimes bodies, this time words. The primary difference for me here is the loosening of authorial control, necessitated by this invitation. And the generosity of the writers as they bring my work into their worlds. The texts aren't

what I would say in relation to these works, and I have heard many of them for the first time at the live event. They reflect the investment of the writers and are written in a wide variety of voices and literary styles. What they have in common is that they come from focused attention to these objects as a way of putting them to use."

So I'm gonna close just with a quote from the performance that I showed you with all the little objects called "And Per Se And." "Note: If you are nervous speaking for a crowd, don't hold a piece of paper up where they can see it, because that's how your trembling becomes visible, vibrating the piece of paper, tiny shakes. The same goes for a glass of water in your hand, ripples." Thanks. {applause}

So I'm very excited to hear your thoughts slash answer your questions, if you have any.

Audience #1: I actually immediately responded to the idea of your usage of dance to inform your idea of making sculpture, and I was brought back to an idea brought by my friends who are theater performers, and that there was this reactivity when performing. And I was wondering how – and especially as the lecture continued, I began to understand your evolving understanding of your viewers impact your understanding of your work. And I was wondering, is it trying to induce a feeling, is it trying to do a particular action? Part of me is saying to myself, is it – cause I am left with so many questions in that category that I'm like, okay, so, is it trying to respond to that viewer in real time, or is it just trying to portray that action, so it induces a feeling? I am almost thinking of, in many of the later sculptures, even, like Heidigger's broken hammer, where you see the extension of both ideas in both directions, what it could be and what it already is. And I'm trying to think about that in relationship to your work, of this, like, dormant object, and how it can, has the potential to be something, and also has meaning laden within it. And I was trying to see how your thoughts about the viewer, and how it's evolved over time, has shaped your work.

Hall: Thank you. That's a great question. If I'm understanding the question correctly, I really try not to, like I don't, I'm not trying to make the viewer, like, think or imagine a specific thing, that never works anyway, but also, I think it kind of, you do it and it's done, you know, like you – and so I think I'm much more, yeah, I'm like more interested in that feeling that something could be used for something. And that could be through imagining whatever use a person wants. I came to this partly through thinking about, Artschwager has these sculptures with handles in them, but you're not allowed to touch them, and I was so fascinated by this, like, why do you have all these furniture, you know, like, Formica furniture things with handles that you can't touch, and I, and I got into thinking about the like bodily double that I am making for myself when I'm looking at the handle that I can't touch. And so I think it was, it's evolved from there, of trying to create that, that bodily double that could grab.

Audience #2: So you mentioned in your talk, in one of your essays, objects, to describe your sculptures. But you've also used the word just like, sculpture. And I've been thinking about the difference between, like, objects and sculptures, in relation to like an art gallery

context. And I was wondering if you think there's a difference, and like what makes an object a sculpture for you?

Hall: Hmm. I do use the words sort of interchangeably. Obviously there's a lot of things that are objects that are not sculptures, but I think all sculptures are objects. And that I guess is mostly determined just by context. Further complicated by the fact that often these things like re-enter my own house, and become furniture again. {laughter} So then they're objects. {laughs} I perhaps am not that precise with the use of those particular words.

Audience #3: Hi. Something that came up a couple times during your presentation was I guess the album or, I guess in a way, a song; you mentioned an album as kind of one of the analogue kind of structures, or themes, like, your groups of sculptures, or something that stood out was the idea that you would title a key work –

Hall: Mmhmm.

Audience #3: -- you know, after the show, or vice versa, like a title track --

Hall: Right. (01:20:01)

Audience #3: -- or it felt like that. So it made me wonder, I guess, your relationship to, or like thoughts on song or sound, like, in your practice or outside of it. Either/or, or both.

Hall: To sound?

Audience #3: Yeah, sound and/or song.

Hall: Thank you. I didn't show any of the works that use sound; there's been like pieces with singers – I guess I talked about the car playing music outside, and there's also been performances with yelling, and talking, so, I think a lot about how sound travels, like, in spaces, and the way voices, especially echoes, like {dog howls} {laughter} – perfect! Just like that. {applause, laughter} How creatures using their voices in different ways, like, can fill space. {laughter} So that has played a part. The structure of how music is released, like, the album, the title track – I mean, I guess I, yeah, I really do think about – it's very hard for me to make, like, one sculpture. And I find that really confusing. It's like, all about these family relationships. So that could be albums, yeah, or like, poems in a collection of poetry, or like, short stories in a collection of short stories, but that, it's really, like, once I've figured a couple of them out, all the others just come from that, and then they feel like part of a group. And I, I, I myself as a viewer really like interacting with like, bodies of work, that are also not so big, you know, like, how much you're giving somebody to absorb in whatever amount of time, and not, it not being too little or too much.

Audience #4: Hello, I'd like to make you two questions; one is about your work in the outs, what could I see by the photos of your work, so, the first is you document your work in a very, in a very precise way, with the photography, so, so the sculptures, or the performance, and interacting with sculptures – sorry for my English, huh? I am not good.

Hall: No, it's good, I like it.

Audience #4: They are done for a very correct, very specific point of view, with a specific light, and, and so on. So I was wondering how much is, how much is important for you, the photography also behind the sculptures? So, you, it looks like to me that also the sculpture in your work is very strong visual and photographic definition.

And also, about your aesthetics and physical aesthetic, the fact that you spend a lot of time drawing on the skin of the concrete, or wood, to give a vibe and a color. You also could take a brush and do it in five minutes, but you spend maybe days to do it, so it connects you with a specific object, and it brings an intimacy, I don't know if it's correct English, intimacy?

Hall: Yeah.

Audience #4: Intimata.

Hall: Mmhmm.

Audience #4: And please, if you could tell me about that.

And finish, this is very, maybe it's just my imagination, but I'd like to ask you, deconstruction is important in your work I imagine, no? So, I related that to the philosophy of twentieth century of Europe, Europe, where I came from, so I was thinking about the body without organs, by Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, and in the logic of sense and schizophrenia and psychoanalysis, if there is a relation of the body becomes object, that became an object, and the body without organs, talk about, from Deleuze please, thank you.

Hall: Yeah. Regarding photography, I'm not a photographer at all, but I do drive the photographer crazy, being like {laughter} here there, here, there. I'm really not trying to make them for photographs. I really want people to come see them in person, but I also do feel like, such is the world. {laughter} I may as well do the best I can getting the best photos I can, and yeah, I have very particular ways of looking at them, and very symmetrical. So I think I'm trying to reproduce my own eye, of height, and symmetry, and whatever. But it's mostly intuitive, there's no, like, science behind it.

Audience #5: {off mic} [UNINTELLIGBLE]

Hall: Sometimes. Yeah, website, books, posterity, I don't know. Yeah. Just also, for anyone who makes sculpture or big painting, like, once it's wrapped up, you don't get to visit it, cause it's too heavy. Or it gets taken apart, and so, the pictures are all I have left from a lot of these, which is very sad to me. Or I have to go like visit them in their sarcophagus, where they live. {laughter} You know, like, otherwise known as my storage space. {laughter} So I think that has also motivated wanting to get the best set of images. You know, and for every

photograph you saw here, there's like ten more of each piece, it's like trying to choose, yeah.

But I have really mixed feelings about it, like, pictures of sculpture aren't sculpture. Which seems like an obvious thing to say, but, that's not how things operate, right, these days. {laughs} So.

With your third question, I'm not a huge Deleuze person, honestly. I don't have any problem with him, but he's not been super influential. Abigail mentioned I was like a philosophy major, and I have a master's in visual studies, so yeah, I'm like a theory person, but I feel like it's very intentional that all the reading I do that helps shape my own thought, it's not showing up now. Because I do it. I'm just trying to do it. But, I'd totally be into having a reading group or something with people who are interested in that. But I feel like, I mean, I think of theory very similarly as I think about art, which is that the point of it is to help you do stuff. Which is probably why {laughing} I didn't become an academic. {laughter}

Audience #6: I was wondering, you mentioned that you create, like, bodies of work, like, it's a body of work, and then a piece might be shown on its own later. Between the bodies of work, do pieces end up together? Or is it important that the bodies of work be separate things?

Hall: Like, do the bodies of work ever get mixed together?

Audience #6: Yeah.

Hall: That happened for the first time last year. I had a show in Maine, in Rockland, that was like a big three-person show, so, not only was the three of our work mixed together, but it was also work from all different times of mine mixed together, and of course the like controlling freak in me was like, no! This is – but it looked fine. {laughter} So, and I was teaching, and I couldn't be there to install it, so I just let it happen, and, it was good, it was fine, so {laughter} I'm learn, I'm learning to be a little, like, less controlling about that, I mean yeah, ideally, like in a perfect world, somebody buys the whole show. You know? They don't, but that's not what's happening, they're getting all separated, and, it's okay. And it can actually be fun, you know how it is, like, something you made sits next to something else you made, several years earlier. Interesting relations can happen. You know, sometimes I'm surprised by seeing things together. Or in a situation like this, like when I start putting all the works next to each other, interesting, you know, fun things can come from that that weren't in my mind when I was working on each group.

Audience #7: Hello. Hi --

Hall: Hi.

Audience #7: -- over here. I just wanted to ask about if you could talk about the choice to use certain materialities. I think that like concrete has this, like, it identifies with being like

fluid, and also rigid at the same time, and I was kind of wondering if you could speak on how you choose materials, how, like other, like materials like wood and brass come into your practice, yeah.

Hall: Yes! I'm trying to branch out. (01:29:57) I like {laughter} made an aqua resin thing, and I'm like getting into different sculpting materials, but I do think a lot about the materials. The way I explained it, like, I use these materials, I'm trying to keep my vocabulary really small, I guess partly cause it, like, helps me make things, actually, to have a, fewer options, in a certain sense. And then the things I choose is a lot for their associations. Like, I love concrete because it's everywhere, and we use it for everything, and you're like almost always sitting or standing on it, and you drive on it, and it's just ubiquitous, and then to be able to use it in this incredibly delicate ornamental way feels exciting to me, and same with, like, paper, and colored pencils, and it's sort of all just like basic materials. Trying to push them to their maximum potential or something like that. And that kind of magic, like, a person trying really hard to do something that's not that complicated, if that makes sense? It's kind of like, that's the vibe, less like, I mean sculpture, when you get fabricators involved, and like, the incredible materials that exist, like, it can be total magic. But I want all the things to, when you look at them, to kind of like understand, I know this material, I kind of understand how this is made, in a general sense, and that feels like an important part of, like, relating to the, the thing. But I often have fabricators be like, {clenching their voice like speaking out the side of one's mouth} you know, it'd be easier if we just like, cast it in plaster. And I'm like, no, it has to be concrete! You know, because you only get to – like, your title, materials, that's like where you get to say something, and the materials are part of how you read the work, so, I want the word that's in there to be, like, the right word.

Audience #8: Hey. I guess, my question is relating to how do you choose what material is adorning the concrete? Like how do you choose between colored pencil, pen, etcetera, etcetera?

And then also, I don't know, seeing it, like, my relation, like, seeing it reminded me of this like also relationship to like just like body modification, and how a lot of folks just use that as a, as a means to also create this relationship to what they want, physically, their body to look like, so, so yeah, I don't know if that's where you're going, but yeah. {laughs}

Hall: I don't know the answer to the first one, like how I choose what I'm gonna use. Like the current show, the one I'm working on now, in the fall, *Turn Back* is all black and white and grey, so hence the pen, and there's like black colored pencil in it, so there's just not, it limits my choices, so, that's more intuitive.

But the question about body modification, I think the whole thing is about body modification, in a way. Or like, I'm making bodies as a way of dealing with my own body. And to me it feels really, like, to embrace the position of, like, creative agency, with like your own flesh, feels really exciting to me, and like, that's what sculpture does for me, yeah. I don't have any tattoos though.

Audience #8: It's okay. {laughs}

Audience #9: Hi. So, I noticed that a lot of your work is very reactionary to what you're making. Has there been a situation where that reaction or some experience or some, anything, some learned thing has changed the way you think about a past work that maybe has happened over a period of time?

Hall: Could you be a little more specific?

Audience #9: Like, has you made a work, and then five years later changed your mind about how you feel it, and then, did that effect how you experience or maybe how you think the work should be experienced?

Hall: Well, when I had my friend make my website, I had him make a little button in the backhand of every project that just makes it disappear without erasing the code so that I can go through my cycles of shame around each project. {laughter} That's maybe not – but I, but, in all seriousness, I do often feel like, it's so, it's so hard to know what you just did, or if you believe in what you just did, and, and sometimes it's just time for the show, and so, this is what happened. And yeah, I'll like hate it, and then love it, and then – and many of the things that I, I was saying this at dinner the other night, partly in the spirit of like what Skowhegan is about, is like, the thing, some of the pieces I like the most are the ones that felt really kind of stupid or almost like jokes when I made them. Like, the video of the miniature room, that was kind of like, oh, I don't know, is this even a work? Or those weird little blocks that like went under people, underneath other people's work. That was almost a joke. But, thinking back about it, I feel like, no, this makes a lot of sense, I'm trying to think about the space of the group exhibition as a room that has relationships, and I don't want to just like be in the line-up, I want to, like, be underneath, so, I think, I don't know if this completely answers your question, but like, perspective over time definitely changes how I feel about things. And I sometimes make things vanish. {laughter}

Audience #10: I was curious to hear more about the choice to use the really fine point mark, ballpoint pen or pencils to cover the objects. In the last bit of text that you read about the water rippling, or the paper shaking, like, that made me think about, yeah, the choice to use these really futile, like, {laughs} borderline futile ways of coloring an object, or if it was more to, as another way to get to know the object that you're replicating.

Hall: Yeah. The things I do, they're time-consuming, but they're not, like, Tara Donovan level time-consuming. You know, like, you just sit around and color and like watch TV or listen to books or whatever. You know< I like it because when you look at it, anybody, like, everybody doodles when they're on the phone; everybody colored when they were a kid. Like, if you can see the lines, you know right away how that was made. And you know exactly how long it would take to do it, in an intuitive way, so I think that's what it's about, is like, it's just such a direct trace of me having spent time with it. And it's not about, like, showing off, like, oh, look how long I can spend coloring, cause it's not that long {laughter}; it's more just, again, it's like not creating the magic, like, how did this surface get made? It's

like, well, you know exactly how it got made, you just took a thing that you use all the time, and you just went like this. You know. So, and then, certain materials have different associations. Like, ballpoint pen in particular feels like the least art pen {laughs} there is. You know. So I think there's something about that, too, like, it's what you take notes in in your notebook in middle school or whatever. Does that answer your? Yeah.

Audience #11: A don't touch it kind of gig where, a lot of us are in. You were talking about, like, are you interested in seeing the object and wondering how I can use the object, or do you actively allow the audience to participate in the, like, connection with the object? Or is it personal?

Hall: That's a very good question. So, generally speaking, the works are not touchable. Sometimes for practical reasons, like, they're fragile, or whatever, but more because my experience has been that often with interactive artwork, it can kind of turn into like a gimmick that sort of short circuits the experience. So it's like you're like, oh, I can sit on this, and you go, and you sit, and you're like, did it, and you're like, great, bye! And what I'm more interested in is like, just looking at stuff, you know? But the piece that you saw that was like the big ball and claw in the ground, that was at Socrates, and people, yeah, like, it was a birdbath, people put their coffee cups, like, dogs peed on them, like {laughter} people used, it had like a butt indent on the top, so it totally was also a chair. That was actually really, really fun for me, watching people use them. And I'm working on a piece now that I didn't talk about at all, but it's a, also in September in this show that's in Istanbul and it's all of these like low to the ground cast concrete kind of like curbs that are in forms that come from things that are vertical in the room, windows, and this stage. And I'm trying a totally new thing, which is, it's completely sitonable, and the performances happen, all different little short random ones, right there on things next to the people. And some of the performances are so subtle – like, one of them is like, people with really nice acrylic nails playing Candy Crush or Tetris on their phones. {laughter} So, you don't know whether you're seeing it or not, so I'm kinda trying out what it's like to actually have people to be able to use them in certain situations. (01:40:02) So it's not, it's not a closed question for me, but often I think it's been about, like, that exact thing, like, just looking at it. How can I make something that tries to ask you to do more than just look at it while still just looking at it?

Audience #11: Yes, like I do see the, the works being successful on like a public, like, sculpture setting. Like, have you done that?

Hall: I haven't really gone into that world. Just for no reason other than that it's not what's found me yet. But maybe it will. {laughter} Putting that out in the universe.

Audience #12: I'm, I was thinking a lot about rules – hey. I was thinking a lot about rules, and systems, and the, like, stack of paper that matches the thickness of the bench, and this, what I sense is like maybe a kind of like joy in an obsessive specificity. And I was thinking about how the proposition is in so many ways about expansiveness, and how you think about specificity and expansiveness, and how, like, narrow pathways can lead to openness, and just, yeah, curious to riff on that.

Hall: I love this question. So, in some sense, you know, like, you are who you are. I realized in horror the other day that, like, every thing I've ever made is symmetrical. {laughter} And I didn't even mean to – you know, it's like, in grad school, I like tried to make messy videos, like Ryan Trecartin, and it was just a total fail – you know, {laughter} you just can't be other than who you are. So in some sense, it's like, this is just – I was a ballet dancer, you know, I would like go an hour early just to like perfectly do the bun. You know, like, it's just in my soul to like be fussy about stuff. But, also, and now I am bringing up theory, {laughter} some of the theory I get most excited about is like late Foucault, all about self-discipline and freedom, and I've really, I really feel like, yeah, the, in many situations, the opposite of constraint is like breaking things open and making a mess and exploding. But in a lot of other situations, the opposite of someone controlling you is you controlling yourself even better. And that {laughing} is how I live. And, and to me, that's a lot of what artmaking is about, is like, I'm, the only way I can find freedom is to make systems that are mine. But I don't, this is not prescriptive, cause this is, people have different ways of finding these things. {laughter}

Audience #13: Hi. I have a thought, or a question concerning your, your choice of the objects, and if at times you are drawn to objects – I like this idea of learning and becoming intimate with the object by recreating it, and like the bench, for instance, is an object made for multiple people, multiple bodies, but a lot of your objects are for singular bodies, and I had the thought of, like, a mattress. So a bench has an action or a purpose of rest, or maybe a couple of people resting and having conversation, but a mattress has various meanings, or various uses. And I was wondering if, when you create an object that is considered to one body, versus an object like, let's say a mattress, that would be for multiple bodies, is there, I mean, as you consider that, is it something that you've avoided, or is it something that is, I don't know, like a threesome, you know? {laughter}

Hall: {laughing} Yeah.

Audience #13: I guess, in its form, you know, because, if it were for multiple bodies. I just, you know, I was just, along those lines. I don't know if there's a question there, but, if you could talk about that a little bit.

Hall: Yeah, this is a great question, I've actually never really thought about this. There was many things about the bench project that were anomalous, including the fact that it ended up like being about this person, which, that's just what the world gave me, and I, so there's only one project that's narrative in that way. Maybe another one will come, but I can't go looking for it, cause that's not how it works. Yeah, what is it? I think I'm drawn – partly it's about scale, like I'm drawn to little things that I can just kind of pick up, and I, maybe cause I'm alone in the studio, I'm thinking about, like, a chair, or a stool, a, you know. And then, I actually think the joke about the threesome is kind of right in a certain sense, which is that one kind of pitfall that I'm often trying to avoid is like, having a conversation about, like, intimate human relations always be about couples. So, perhaps, yeah, if there were things for more people, they would have to be for, like, three or more people. I don't really love the idea of making lots of things for two people. There's just been a lot said {laughing} on

that topic. {laughter} But your question makes me want to try to, yeah, make some things for more bodies, or is there ways to make them – oop, speaking of a twosome. {laughter} These mosquito things are – although, the thing I’m working on for Turkey right now maybe is that, it’s like lots of different people on lots of different things, and they can sit next to each other in rows, so maybe I’m trying it?

Audience #13: Thank you!

Hall: Yeah.

Audience #14: Hi, here. I, I have a question in relationship to the word relation, to objects. And also, the toolness of objects. So, we are occupying bodies and objects occupying space together, and interacting with one another, but I was wondering if you had an idea, if you had a thought about the use of something, versus the relationship between something that creates, like, be – that creates each other. Does that make sense? If not, I can go and --

Hall: Can you say the first thing you said at the beginning again?

Audience #14: I was thinking, I was asking about, between tools? The tools –

Hall: Tool.

Audience #14: -- the toolness of something, or the use of something, versus the relationship between something that keeps informing one another. So not as a, not as a stagnant object, stag, like, no, and, yeah a stagnant object, body, between – {laughing} I don’t know if I’m making sense, but I was wondering if you have a thought about it, because you use the word ‘use’ of an object a lot --

Hall: Mmhmm.

Audience #14: -- and if you think of them as tools, or if you, yeah, at all.

Hall: Yeah. I think I understand what you mean. It’s, I don’t know, it’s complicated, cause yes, they’re tool, and, but they’re also useless, or, their use is not practical. So it’s like a broken tool. That’s not a great answer, but that’s the best I can do, I think.

Audience #15: Well, can I ask --

Hall: Sure. Yes.

Audience #15: -- and suggest, that you kind of [UNCLEAR], maybe you can talk a little more about the refusal as part of, the object utility, or – does that make sense?

Hall: Yes. Yeah, so there’s a kind of a, what could be perceived as a tension in the work, which is that it’s, like, all about inviting people to imagine things, but also very, like, facing away from you, or kind of closed. And, I mean I think I was clearish about my kind of, like,

investments in refusing certain, like, demands of legibility, and not being interested in a certain kind of like transparent attention economy that is very part of artmaking. But also, I guess I think too about, like, what mode of looking I'm asking for, and I guess one word that has been helpful for me has been witnessing, rather than watching. So one example I sometimes give is, like I went to a funeral at a Catholic church, and because I'm not Catholic, I don't understand what's going on, but, and I feel confused, but, I also feel interested, and I know that everything is happening for a really precise reason, even if I don't know what that reason is. (01:50:18) And so I am there to witness something. And religious ritual is that way in general. Like, it's not a performance, but it needs to happen in front of other people. So the wit, the being present for it, the witnessing of it, is part of what makes it have power. And I think even with the static things, part of the facing away, or the, I keep doing this, like the kind of closing of the hands, is not about – I really hope, you know, it's not about shutting people out, it's about, perhaps, asking someone to allow themselves into the experience of witnessing something that doesn't make total sense, but like allowing yourself to kind of be in that place of not being able to name something, or read something. And just to extend that like five seconds. And so that requires a certain kind of illegibility, because the moment we can name something, we've like, owned it, or, it's stopped creating that open space, or something.

Audience #16: I actually fixed in on that, actually --

Hall: Oh.

Audience #16: -- cause I was actually about to ask you about the time required, that somebody would think about acting, right? So we think about like pulling as a very temporary action, and I almost liken it to, like, glancing, looking, staring, or almost inspecting. And when I think about some of the actions that you've reproduced in some of your works, I think of them as a conflation of different sets of time. So you have one that is pulling, and one that is sitting, and one that is contemplating, and those things kind of overlap with each other to produce this kind of inter, interhighway of different kinds of time, almost. So you're sitting with something in a very awkward way, and that's actually {laughing} what I was going to ask you before you went into that very explanation, it was like, do you think about, cause you even went down to this diagram type of level of saying hey, when I have enough time, I actually use that time to, you know, you know, create a map for all of these things. And I was wondering also about the later things, because it also ties back into performance, is that idea spread into your later works or your more recent works, where you think about the time required to notice, say, for instance, the shadow being purple, or someone standing and noticing this different kind of orientation.

Hall: Yes? I like just want you to write a catalogue essay {laughing} about my work, {laughter} that was very good. I'm like, {laughing} sounds really right! But, I'll just probably pull out one thread of it which is, yes, I think time is very important, and it's about, like, creating a situation in which people can spend time with something, so like, the way I use color is a big part of that. When colors are very similar to each other, they only become different looking once you look at them for a while. Or something like with the shadow, like you wouldn't notice it right away unless you were like staring – like, you know, so it's kind

of like, I'm making the work – this is what it boils down to: I'm making the work for the person who spends the longest. Which is the opposite of, I think, a lot of how, like, attention works, which is making work for the, to try to get the person who spends the least time to stay.

Audience #17: Hey. Hey, Gordon. Eric, over here. Hi.

Hall: {laughing} It's so confusing.

Audience #17: Quick – this might actually be just a piggyback to what you just said, so, but, it seems you make a lot of work for the audience, in some way, or with the audience in mind, or, perhaps some type of temporality to be experienced by the audience, and I'm wondering if there are people, or persons, you're trying to protect in the work, something you haven't spoken maybe directly about. Or like the performers in the work. And these are just people I'm thinking who might be protected, including yourself. But if there, are there moments of, or instances of questioning who, I'm questioning who you want to protect and just want to know if you want to protect someone.

Hall: Can you explain what you mean by protect?

Audience #17: I don't know, the audience is always conflicted, but I think sometimes, similar to when you said you're making the work for who stays the longest, like, maybe the work isn't for the person who stays the shortest, right? And there's a sort of type of protective empathy or like a care for the person who stays the longest, and that's sort of what I mean by protect.

Hall: I think, I mean yes, I am, I'm like trying to, trying to give, I don't know, yeah, I'm trying to like reward the energy that's given. Weirdly, and people who do performance probably are familiar with this, I'm sure you are, is like, asking other people to look at your body is both extremely unsafe, and vulnerable-making, but when you do it on your own terms, in the context of your own work, it can feel like totally safe. Or, almost like, reparative. Which is part of my interest in, like, objectification, like yeah, what happens when I try to like be one of my sculptures? I really, I, the question of working with people in the performances I think is really hard, and I, I try to like, let them choose which things they're gonna do, I like have them do it, like, they do it. I don't say, like, 'Do it like this;' I say, 'Sit how you would sit,' you know, stuff like that. So they're using their own body in the way that they would. And like if anybody ever feels uncomfortable, I like completely don't ever, you know, it's all about people feeling fine, because I know how fraught it can be to be looked at. But there is kind of an amazing – and maybe this comes from my dance background, too, like the trust between, like, dancers and choreographers is quite beautiful, and I've been on both sides of it, so I think, I'm trying to create a space which is like reparative for me, by being, like, by trying to be an object and figure out what that can be, for me, and also maybe, like, give that to them. Yeah.

Audience #18: I have, like, a pretty, like, quick question about this really elegant and to me superstar kind of supersan [?] material escalation with the wood shim to brass. Whoa!

{laughter} There was something about the bench, and the seriousness and level facing relationship to also the installed bench that felt really, like, revelatory for me to see. Do you see yourself making that kind of material projection with the bench, or like, the wood viewing bench relative to the installed material, and a kind of, like, just, this is sort of more about the way the scale of the shim is small, and the proclivity you have toward this small-scale kind of like framing escalation being really nice. Is that viewing angle materiality kind of like a, not an after, but like a, hm! This is for – hm meaning like, this is for, not a non-, not a non-concern, cause it looked so concerned, the bench with which you viewed the bench from --

Hall: The wood bench.

Audience #18: Yeah! But do you see yourself ever, like, making a brass bench is kind of my shortform question {laughter} about, like, like, this kind of like scaling of materiality or, like, a kind of comment on something, I don't know.

Hall: I think I know what you're asking, and it's one of, you know, everyone in their studio has, like, little, the little, like, pitfall that you're worried about doing? For me, one of them is, you know, like, the, that ceramic mug you can get that looks like one of the paper mugs from the diner, or the like glass milk carton you can buy --

Audience #18: Uh-huh.

Hall: -- that's like the worst possible version of my work, like, you know, it could just turn into being like, I'm gonna elevate this everyday thing in this fancy material.

Audience #18: Mmhmm.

Hall: So, the idea has crossed my mind, but I often cross them off for this exact reason, kind of, which is that that, yeah, just that kind of like, oooh! It used to be useless, and now it's valuable – especially the way certain materials, like, you know, like, brass in particular, or any kind of casting in metal like elevates something --

Audience #18: Mmhmm.

Hall: -- that's sort of like not a, not a world I'm trying to enter into. Or like, I think care is different than, like, elevation. (01:59:57)

Audience #18: Okay.

Hall: Yeah?

Audience #18: Thank you! {Hall laughs}

Audience #19: Hey. I was, I have a question about, I mean, it's a bit from like the personal perspective when you think about the object you make, so, a lot of the objects have a very

simple form, and they speak in a kind of a very sophisticated but low tone. And you spoke a lot about becoming a sculptor later after working with movement and dance, so I'm wondering if this kind of tone has been always your voice, or is it something you reached from like a place of growth, and like, did it take a lot of, like, more expressive and loud voices in your earlier work? I'm just curious about it, because I'm wondering how could you, like, kind of be focusing on, like, the small things in, like – I, I don't know, I think you understand my question, I'm not sure how to do that. {laughs}

Hall: Yeah. It's waxed and waned over the years. Like, my work from undergrad was like a psychedelic, it felt, pompom chipmunk explosion, it was completely different, I'll show you pictures, it was very weird. And then graduate school was like, I made a religion, I like pretended that I was remaking a religion that I saw these like theater techies doing that were worshipping the screensavers on these stereos made by the brand AIWA that said, like, rock pop classic. Does anybody – anyway, so it was about ritual, and subculture, and monochromality, so it was all these stereos, and black CDs, and black Coke bottles, and flags, and staffs, and keychains. Anyway, so that was – and then, from there, it got, it was just white shapes, like, very, very toned, sort of pulled back, I think it was like a defensive, post grad school, like, I'm not gonna do anything somebody would like {laughter} because – and then later, it was like, oh, my god, color, {laughter} and like recognizable things, and, so it's kind of, it's gone through just different iterations of, like, minimal maximal, identifiable not, like, beautiful, or refusing to be beautiful, kind of, but it just changes.

And yeah, now I'm working on this black and white and gray show, with a very dim lighting, with the moving light shaft as like a lot of the illumination in the room, so that's like, it had a, I think I'm pulling back again. You know, who knows why you wander, how you wander.

Audience #19: Thank you.

Hall: I must have answered all your questions by now. {laughter, applause, cheering}