

Build

on this

Gesture

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Foreword

Jane Becker Nelson

director and curator, Flaten Art Museum

Build on this Gesture features eight studio artists currently working and teaching within St. Olaf College’s Department of Art and Art History and Flaten Art Museum: Krista Anderson-Larson, D’Angelo Christian, Sophie W. Eisner, Courtney M. Leonard, Peter Bonde Becker Nelson, Anders Nienstaedt, John Saurer, and Michon Weeks. The exhibition is on view at St. Olaf College’s Flaten Art Museum from February 6 to April 7, 2023. The work reflects the artists’ current research, expertise, and teaching interests, as well as emergent forms that embrace experimentation. The word “gesture” was used by many of the exhibiting artists to describe an aspect of, or motivation for, their work. Their meanings varied (expressive body movement, emphasis, symbolic offering, human connection) but always suggested something preliminary—something to build on.

This exhibition catalog highlights eight distinguished essayists working across Minnesota as curators, artists, writers, and creatives: Kehayr Brown-Ransaw, Zoe Cinel, Mike Curran, Heid E. Erdrich, Laura Wertheim Joseph, Matthew Villar Miranda, Melanie Pankau, and Andy Sturdevant. Each writer was paired with one exhibiting artist, and the pair became acquainted through studio visits and video chats. Their essays offer poignant, novel, and sometimes amusing interpretations of the new work on view. Seeding relationships of mutual creative exchange is a delightful outcome of this project—another gesture to build on.

Bath and Body Works

Kehayr Brown-Ransaw

Bathrooms are among the most important and most used rooms in a building. Their primary purpose is in direct service to the body. In both private and public spaces, they can provide users with an escape from the noise of being in the world. But in this silence, a respite from the noises of the world, users are left with the noises of their minds. Krista Anderson-Larson's artistic practice explores the relationship that queer people have to their bodies, in and with the privacy and safety of the bathroom. These works investigate and expand on pivotal moments — Anderson-Larson is curious about what it means to have the architectural space of the bathroom intrinsically tied to initial sexual development and the development of one's sexuality.

Through Anderson-Larson's sculptures, *Untitled: Bathtubs* [Figure 1] and *Untitled: Hand Dryers* [Figure 2], the fixtures become characters in their individual narratives. At their core, both sculptures explore a relationship of care through a reciprocal give-and-take. *Untitled: Bathtubs* presents two white fiberglass bathtubs, one on top of another at a slight angle. Similarly, affixed to a public bathroom stall door, *Untitled: Hand Dryers* presents two hand dryers commonly found in public restrooms. One dryer is turned upside down, with its opening in line with the other as though they could pass air between the two. Anderson-Larson's use of doubles is referential to the work and practice of Félix González-Torres, affirming for the viewer the role of these objects as bodies.

These sculptures are also reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, 1917, perhaps the most famous of found object sculptures. Anderson-Larson's work parallels *Fountain*'s elevation of the mundane and subsequent polarization, and explores the closeness of the artist's relationship to these objects. Young children are not shy about nudity and often want to watch adults in the bathroom as a way of learning or understanding their own bodies.



Figure 1: Krista Anderson-Larson, *Untitled: Bathtubs*, 2022, fiberglass bathtubs. Photography: Caleb Wood

What Anderson-Larson presents is a situation when that other human character is absent, and all we are left with is the reflection of ourselves in the spaces we occupy, private and public. There is a distortion of two kinds of touch where in the end they become one in the mind: the first being the intimacy of sexual touch of one's body and the second being the touch of knowing one's bathroom as from cleaning it. Krista transforms the space into a sanctuary of sensual exploration free from outside judgment, revealing the importance of child/teenage private interactions between the self and the body.



Figure 2:
Krista Anderson-Larson,
Untitled: Hand Dryers, 2022,
bathroom stall door and
cast iron hand dryers.
Photography: Courtesy of
the artist

Between the Womb and the Waiting Room:

the Intimacy of Non-Spaces¹ in the Works of Sophie W. Eisner

Zoe Cinel

Let’s think about connection and familiarity: how does one step into that ephemeral space triggered by the encounter with something, someone, or somewhere? We visit museums to learn, discover, or be entertained, and sometimes we find deep resonance with our history or our identity: a sense of place, perhaps belonging. Is it not paradoxical that this happens in the quintessential decontextualized space: the white cube²? Sophie W. Eisner’s artworks speak to the core of this complex dynamic: what is the balance between representation and abstraction that makes artwork accessible in a familiar yet universal sense?

Stemming from a tradition of contemporary artists that use common or semi-recognizable/modified objects to make statements about relatable aspects of the human condition, Eisner’s work is also permeated by a sense of intimacy and universality that is related to close observation and careful listening. In contemporary art, intimacy is associated with portrait

¹ Augé, Marc. *Non - Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Translated by John Howe. (London: Verso, 1995).
² O’Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the gallery space*. (Santa Monica, San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986).



and documentary photography³, but in Eisner’s practice it assumes a broader cultural significance beyond, but still invoking, individual narratives.⁴

Etymologically, “intimacy” comes from the ancient Greek εν θύμος: εν = “in” and θύμος = “something physical located in the chest: breath or blood.” In the performative installation, *The Nature of Intimacy* [Figure 3], a guitar feeds visceral soft sounds through modified stethoscopes, whose bells rest on individual metal brackets placed in selected spots on the guitar’s body. During this concert for eight, space and place, spectatorship and performance, fictional and ancestral merge and collide.

When not performing, the guitar sits at the center of the installation on a custom-made stand while the stethoscopes rest on handcrafted supports resembling IV stands. From the metal brackets, resembling electrode pads on a body, to colorful, altered stethoscopes, all the elements designed by the artist walk a line between human and machine, unique and standard, soft and sanitized—between a womb and a waiting room.

In Eisner’s installations *Partnering* and *Beside* [Figure 4], mixed media sculptures of concrete, wood, fabric, steel, burlap, and plaster in shades of gray and sea green welcome the visitor to a hospital still life, a window display, or a sci-fi movie set. “Postmodern spaces—disconnected locations joined into networks by real though invisible and intermittent links”⁶ are critiqued by artist Martha Rosler in *In the Place of the Public: Airport Series*, 2011⁷, and analyzed by

Opposite

Figure 3 (top): Sophie W. Eisner, *The Nature of Intimacy*, 2022, steel, stethoscope parts, tubing, electric guitar. Photography: Caleb Wood

Figure 4 (bottom): Sophie W. Eisner, *Beside*, 2023, steel, fabric, batting, concrete, wood. Photography: Caleb Wood

³ Think about Nan Goldin’s photographic series, the *Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, where “its protagonists—including the artist herself—are captured in intimate moments of love and loss.” Or Melissa Ianniello’s somber portraits of older gay individuals and couples in their homes in various Catholic and atheist LGBTQIA+ communities around Italy.

“Nan Goldin: The Ballad of Sexual Dependency,” *MoMA, The Museum of Modern Art*, accessed January 2, 2023, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1651>.

Ianniello, Melissa. “Wish It Was a Coming out,” *Melissa Ianniello - Photographer*, accessed January 5, 2023, <https://melissaanniello.com/Wish-it-Was-a-Coming-Out>.

⁴ From Eisner’s statement: “I am particularly concerned with the intersection of intimacy and utility. Over time, places where we confront ourselves as bodies, such as the kitchen and the bathroom, come to carry meanings beyond how they are used. I reimagine familiar objects in unexpected materials, making shifts in scale and in orientation.”

Eisner, Sophie W. “Statement.” *Sophie Eisner*, accessed January 1, 2023. <https://www.sophieeisner.com/statement>.

⁵ For distinction between place and space refer to Augé, *Non - Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, 81.

“The place has to come to life and journeys have to be made ... The term ‘space’ is more abstract in itself than the term ‘place,’ whose usage at least refers to an event (which has taken place), a myth (said to have taken place), or a history (high places).”

⁶ Doran, Anne. “They Know Why You Fly. Martha Rosler on Her Airport Photographs.” *Art News* 116, no. 2 (August 2017): 94-99. August 15, 2017. Accessed January 1, 2023.

<http://www.artnews.com/2017/08/15/they-know-why-you-fly-martha-rosler-on-her-airport-photographs/>

⁷ Interestingly, a similar shade of green used by Eisner in several sculptures can be found in Martha Rosler’s, *Ataturk Airport, Istanbul*, from “In the Place of the Public: Airport Series,” 2011. The image is accompanied by short sentences that contextualize the artist’s thoughts on these spaces. These include the words “hospital regimes”: one more sign of a Western tendency to place this particular color in the institutional medical sphere. The image is referenced from Doran, Anne. “They Know Why You Fly.”

anthropologist Marc Augé as “non-places, meaning spaces (that) do not integrate the earlier places”⁸ (including history). Rather than alienation, Eisner finds there the ground for connection.

Mass-produced materials are manually crafted into original shapes with a minimalistic aesthetic. Just like our skin might look perfectly smooth from afar, but present bumps, pores, spots, and imperfections when observed intimately close, Eisner’s sculptures have unique features resulting from process: the texture from the molding on the pig-legged bench/pillow sculpture [Figure 4], or the bent steel wire welded to create a double-necked black vase. By embracing these imperfections with a subtle sense of humor, Eisner encourages us to find “the poetic qualities of functional objects and space”⁹ and ultimately our sense of place in any familiar or unfamiliar space, including the bathroom, the waiting room, and the white cube.

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8

Augé, *Non - Places*, 78.

9

Eisner, “Statement.” Accessed January 3, 2023. <https://www.sophieeisner.com/statement>

Off Script

Mike R. Curran

Peter Bonde Becker Nelson is a shapeshifter. In his performance *Nine Monologues*, he lip syncs the voices of women and girls who give diverging definitions of femininity. He made *Former Best Friends Forever* through a similar process, interviewing men who, at one point, he considered his “best friends”; in the video, he dresses in costume and mimics the words and mannerisms of each. With *Whiteness at Work*, Nelson’s new stop motion animated film, he summons the proxy of a dough-faced character, his blond hair permanently parted. The five-minute work follows him as he stumbles through memories that have shaped his understanding of whiteness.

Voiced by actor Adam Whisner, the main character’s snappy monologue contains all the requisite sentiment of a white person belatedly coming to terms with their racial identity: guilt and excitement, outrage and shame. Considering Nelson’s positionality as a white artist living in Minnesota, it might be assumed that the film is a reaction to the public murder of George Floyd and the summer of unrest and re-evaluation that followed. In reality, Nelson began the film a couple years prior in an attempt to turn his practice towards whiteness— which he recognized was silently snaking through his earlier projects. (*Former Best Friends Forever*, for instance, is not solely a representation of masculinity, but of *white* masculinity.)

There’s a defensiveness to the character’s monologue—the type of uneasy, now-familiar posturing that white people adopt when disavowing a supremacy they benefit from. But despite—and perhaps because of— this noise, *Whiteness at Work* is most affecting in its silences. As the character searches for the correct thing to say, there are pauses where his blue eyes blink or another figure shifts in their seat. Nelson cites as an influence Roy Andersson’s film *Härlig är jorden* (World of Glory), which alludes to the horrors of the

Holocaust through prolonged silences where the protagonist stares flatly into the camera. Following the character's impassioned plea for white people to "do something" about their privilege, the final scene of *Whiteness at Work* shows him on his couch, scrolling through his phone [Figure 5]. The living room is a drab blue and gray, echoing Andersson's muted color palette.

Whiteness at Work will debut in February at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival. Because the festival has an exclusive agreement to premiere the film, it does not appear in full within this exhibition. Embracing this restriction, Nelson's contribution centers around the physical model of the protagonist within the miniature living room set; a nearby video installation plays cut and extended scenes.

Severed from the fast-paced narrative, these scenes slow the film down, prolonging uneasy silences. Drawing on discomfort is familiar territory for Nelson—his awkward lip syncing in *Nine Monologues*, for example, deters viewers from truly settling into the video. This adapted iteration of *Whiteness at Work* exposes the artifice of stop motion to center a more latent constructedness: the way we maintain white supremacy by talking our way around it. With Nelson's latest project, sitting with discomfort is the point.

Figure 5: Peter Bonde Becker Nelson, *Whiteness at Work*, 2022, stop-motion animation still. Photography: Courtesy of the artist



Figure 6: Peter Bonde Becker Nelson, *Whiteness at Work*, 2022, studio view of set and puppet. Photography: Courtesy of the artist



Meeting Water

Heid E. Erdrich

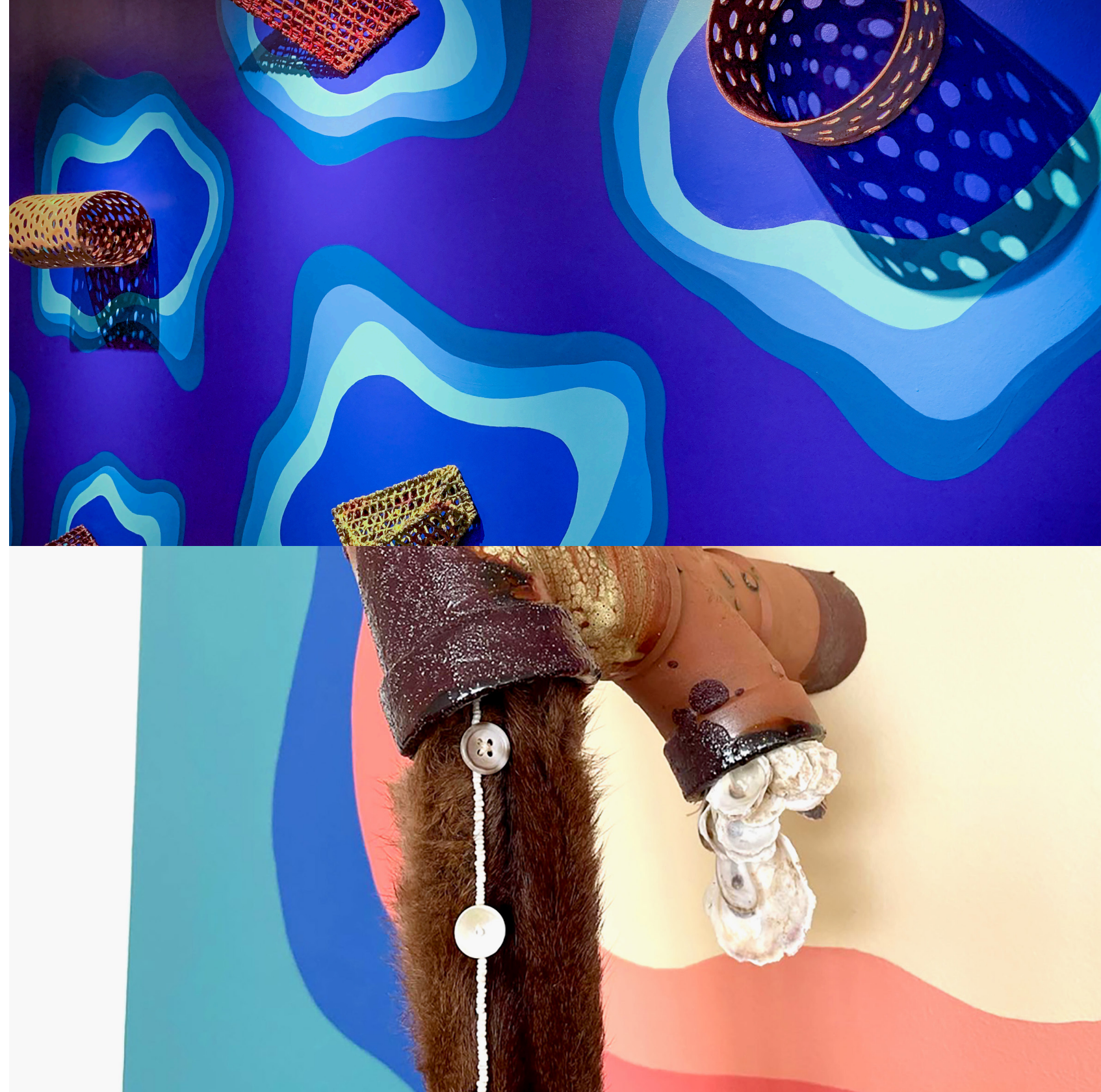
How can water and light be made of earth and fire? I asked this of myself when I first saw Courtney M. Leonard's ceramic depictions of whale teeth, fish traps, and her thumb-sized clay pendants embellished with historical images. I soon learned Leonard's careful combination of the elements works to tell a story that only such a balance of all elements can tell.

Leonard's art is bound to a life and culture that came into being surrounded by water, the Shinnecock homelands, in what is now known as Long Island, NY. In her work I sense a story that arises from water worlds and the threats to them all—threats both to the water worlds and to the Shinnecock people alike. Her shapes speak of water creatures and the work humans have done at sea or on a river—fishing, whaling, gathering shells for tools and art, and more—work we forget forged an extraordinarily successful economy for millennia. That work went on so long without threatening the water and its life because Indigenous people strive to understand their relationship to the creatures they depend upon. Leonard's work continues the careful building of the relationship to water that has served Shinnecock people so long.

Several years ago, Leonard and I were at a convening with other fellowship awardees selected by the Native Arts and Culture Foundation. She gave a brief and insightful presentation on her art and shared the complex and deeply thoughtful process she engaged in before creating—a process of learning not only about place, but *from* place. In the years since, I visited Leonard's installation, *BREACH: LOGBOOK 20 | NEBULOUS*

Opposite

Figure 7 (top): Courtney M. Leonard, *BREACH: LOGBOOK 20 | NEBULOUS*, 2020, ceramic and acrylic. Photography: Courtesy of the artist
Figure 8 (bottom): Courtney M. Leonard, *BREACH: LOGBOOK 25 | CULL - BOOM ISLAND STUDY - MINK DETAIL*, 2023, ceramic, mink fur, virginica oysters, artificial sinew, shell buttons, plastic buttons, and beads. Photography: Courtesy of the artist



[Figure 7], at the Hood Museum of Dartmouth College, and recently spoke with Leonard while she worked on a large installation, *BREACH: LOGBOOK 25: CULL* [Figure 8], that is now being exhibited at the Weisman Art Museum on the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus. In each museum, Leonard presented ceramic works surrounded by color fields built from the experience of being near a body of water. The results are surprising, vibrant, and as immersive as meeting water should be. Leonard’s installations ask us to sink right in and see the way a water creature would when surfacing through rings of light and color. The installations ask us to meet water, learn our human history with it, and rise into our shared world more aware than we were before we met Leonard’s work.

In her consideration of her new home in Minnesota, Leonard’s thoughtful engagement of river environments and the colors and relationships evident there create a moment of meditation for viewers, a consideration of how a body of water holds story and life. It is an introduction to what we might see if we meet a river or creek with curiosity about the other creatures who encounter it, who move through and along it, who depend upon the waters as sincerely as we humans do.

Because we do all depend upon water—we are made of water. We are fire and earth, too—striving for the light.

Hence

Something seen otherwise than by ordinary sight¹

Laura Wertheim Joseph

In this cycle of egg tempera paintings on wood panel, Michon Weeks engages with late medieval liturgical artwork, finding an object within a historical source that captures her attention, and isolating it as the basis for her own work. The paintings that result from this process of decoding and recoding take up an idea or question related to their initial sources but bear little *visual* resemblance. Weeks does not seek ordinary likeness.

When I visited Weeks to see this body of work, she didn’t immediately explain her process or thinking but invited my questions. Although these paintings compelled me to hold back from identifying them, I saw kinship with the work of twentieth-century metaphysical painter Giorgio de Chirico, who engaged visual traditions of the Italian Renaissance to strange and philosophical ends. Isolated objects and figures, ambiguous spaces and architectural features, jarring or incongruous perspectives, a stage-like quality, simplicity of forms, and a sense of containment are hallmarks of de Chirico’s evident in this body of Weeks’ work. In *Entry*, a stone wall recedes into a murky-colored, dimensionless space at a puzzling angle. Weeks painted the side of the wall that appears closest to the viewer directly along the left edge of the panel, creating a sense of tension between two different realities. Is one the world we see, the other the world we *seek* to know?

These paintings raise questions about the role of uncertainty in our lives, and the role of vision in grappling with that uncertainty. Not all require reference to their source, but contemplating *Hence* [Figure 9] alongside the related panel of Duccio’s *Maestà, The Temptation*

¹ Forest Bess as quoted in Jon Yau, “Without Elaboration,” *Hyperallergic*, March 18, 2012, <https://hyperallergic.com/48551/without-elaboration/>

of *Christ on the Mountain* [Figure 10], helped me gain deeper understanding and appreciation for Weeks’ contemporary icons.

Duccio’s *Temptation* depicts the moment Christ refuses the devil’s offer of dominion over the world if Christ will worship him. Against a luminous gold-leaf background, towering above vividly rendered hillsides of Siena, Christ points his finger at the devil, embodying the biblical passage from Matthew 4:8–11: “Get thee hence, Satan.” Christ’s face is modeled with clarity and softness; Satan’s is murky and undecipherable. While Duccio’s rendering of details exemplifies naturalism characteristic of the Renaissance—Christ’s face and drapery, for example—medieval conventions of incongruous scale inform his overall composition. Weeks speaks to her rationale for taking a similar aesthetic approach in her own work: “When it is more realistic spatially, it is more about what it looks like. When it is more schematic, it is more about what it *means*.”²



Figure 9: Michon Weeks, *Hence*, 2022, egg tempera on wood panel. Photography: Courtesy of the artist

In isolating an element from this panel, Weeks looks to Christ’s finger, which casts off the devil, a specter of uncertainty. But the finger occupies space between Christ and the devil and seems to be an emblem of the human struggle to find clarity in the face of uncertainty, of existing between them. Weeks’ translation of the finger into a disembodied rectangular prism that exists in an ambiguous space seems to contemplate this experience of in-betweenness. A background of hatched and layered sea-foam greens and grays contribute to a sense of visual instability and vacillation. The finger-like image spans a raised edge that runs vertically along the left side of the panel, a place where painting becomes a sculptural object, a place where one reality shifts to another. Two of the finger’s straight vertical edges come directly to the panel’s edges, gesturing towards a hunger and longing for something beyond what we see and know.



Figure 10: Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Maestà*, *The Temptation of Christ on the Mountain*, 1308-1311, tempera on wood. Photography: Open source

MY MOM CALLS ME DEE
SO DOES MY AUNTIE
MY BROTHER CALLS ME
SMALL MY GRANDMA CALLS
MY BROTHER CADILLAC JOE
WHATS UP WITH ALL THESE
NAMES PLEASE CALL
ME D'ANGELO¹

Nicknames signal affection, but they can also shorten, reduce, objectify, and infantilize. Like refracted light of a mirror ball, nicknames can endearingly and frustratingly reveal the ways that the many voices of family can impress their image of one upon oneself. As Claudia Rankine recounted in conversation with Judith Butler, “Our very being exposes us to the address of another.... We suffer from the condition of being addressable.”² There is power and harm in a name—in its recognition, denial, or reassignment. A name declares one into being or summons one not physically present. As theater director Awoye Timpo writes, “Names persist beyond the here and now.”³ It is how we “see” each other and call others to our side. As the final line of the poem pronounces, the last word belongs to the keeper.

When asked if the act of tearing up one’s own work was, in a way, an act of reclaiming one’s self, one’s name, or one’s own memories, Christian replies, “The tearing is less about destruction, and more about transformation,” as he thoughtfully arranges the collaged images by the light of the window of his home in Minneapolis.⁴ His apartment window is not just an architectural fixture, but a scrapbook. Upon its glass he has taped fliers from events past, a letterpress print made with fellow students, a portrait of his beloved dog, and a lover’s drawing of the rocks of Minnesota. On his window-cum-journal, he has placed the poem “Genesis” by Etheridge Knight, a man who survived incarceration to become a pylon of the Black Arts and Civil Rights movements. The poem reads, “...split my skin with the rock/ of love old/ as the rock/ of Moses/ my poems love you.”⁵ Through the intermingling of body, earth, and spirit, the *window* is, to Christian, a *lightbox*. It is not a perch from which to survey the outside world; rather, it lets in a binding light that lovingly enlivens the humble things carefully affixed to its surface.

1 Poem from D’Angelo Christian’s personal journal reproduced as a letterpress print from polymer plate.
2 Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014), 49.
3 Kimberlé Crenshaw, host, “51. #SayHerName: I Am My Sister’s Keeper” Intersectionality Matters! (podcast), December 2022, accessed January 5, 2023, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/6ZSUoG3DLJ1CLSDuPsPscQ?si=aa380a9dc9074cd8>.
4 Author’s personal correspondence with the artist D’Angelo Christian.
5 Knight, Etheridge, “Genesis” (Minneapolis: Minnesota Center for Book Arts, 1988). Printed at Coffee House Press and published on the occasion of the author’s reading in The Loft Mentor Series, February 12, 1988. Copyright 1988 by Etheridge Knight. Handset in Bush and Perpetua types. Drawing by Kent Aldrich. Edition of 150.

The window of his own home prefigures his collages. Like the ambient blue of the gum bichromate embedded in *Home, Long Beach, CA*, Christian has used the window as the aperture of light from which to photographically and conceptually develop images. On a table near the window rests a book of writings by Jesse Murray, a queer Black painter whose atmospheric abstractions often encapsulated the haze and uncertainty of the HIV and AIDS crisis. In theorizing the aesthetics of rendering space, he writes, “...WINDOW WALL + DREAM. By WINDOW I mean space that is penetrable to the mind and the edge. By DREAM I acknowledge the role my subconscious has in shaping and intuiting the language and elements of painting into a new reality.”⁶ A window-in-painting to Murray is a window-in-photography for Christian. Photographs are not static documents or still moments, but gestures. Reality and intuition torn, dodged, burned, and healed. This agency in shaping one’s inner world through a kind of “gestural photography” defies what Roland Barthes called photography’s “fatality” or “the windowpane and the landscape” as concepts that “cannot be separated without destroying both.”⁷ To Christian, the window and the land relate like siblings, as if asking, “Why destroy when you can save both?”

In *Home, Long Beach, CA*, Christian insists there are three entities: two sons and a mother. Though not explicitly imaged, he clarifies, “The mother is the light.”⁸ The window may define the limit of a picture; it can separate an interior and outer world; it can signal containment or freedom; it can also let in light. Christian’s photos reflect an alchemical light that transmutes the surface of synthetic tarps into golden lamé; envelopes a weary brother in a warm magenta halo; traces the electric blue lines on a grandma’s bible. One of Christian’s images re-pictures a photograph of his mother and brother together, forget-me-not flowers strewn at its foot, a feather miraculously propping it up. The fire of a votive candle lights this mother’s altar, a perplexing purple glare hovers above it [Figure 12]. So-called light leaks can cause aberrations in a photograph when stray light incidentally exposes the film. Often thought of as a defect, Christian lets this errant light remain (“My mom believes in orbs”).⁹ As if speaking through his mother, the photographs depict light-as-body, an energy through a windowed threshold that renders two forcibly separated brothers visible and near. Christian writes freely of love, thinks of family often, and gives light to the dreams that windows and walls cannot contain: “Love is hard; it’s like holding the light of a horizon.”¹⁰

6 Murray, Jesse. *Painting is a Supreme Fiction: Writing by Jesse Murray, 1980–1995* (Chicago: Soberscove Press, 2021), 163.
7 Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 6.
8 Author’s personal correspondence with the artist D’Angelo Christian.
9 Author’s personal correspondence with the artist D’Angelo Christian. “Orbs” in this colloquial sense take its literal meaning of “celestial body” to mean the spirit or soul of a person that cannot easily be seen by the mortal eye.
10 Author’s personal correspondence with the artist D’Angelo Christian.



Figure 12:
D'Angelo
Christian,
Untitled, 2022,
inkjet print.
Photography:
Courtesy of the
artist

All That Glitters Is Not Gold

Melanie Pankau

John Saurer's work is steeped in place and time.

Montana. It is here where Saurer rests in the quietude of geological time. The homelands to fir, hemlock, larch, pine, and spruce along with the open skies, long views, and meandering waterways, offer references for many of his drawings and prints.

New York. The hyperactive pace of the city with its concrete rivers and steel mountains feeds the artist's creative impulse, resulting in patterned metal sculptures and gridded constructions. Saurer describes "being in the presence of something greater than myself" when he stands within these opposing landscapes.

Between these two poles, his axis has been Minnesota for the last three decades.

Saurer's creative methodology is rooted in matrixes of multiples spanning the mediums of drawing, printmaking, and sculpture. He composes large-scale installations out of smaller elements that are improvisationally placed on the gallery walls. It is in this riffing where meaning, making, and reflecting unfold.



Figure 13: John Saurer, *All That Glitters Is Not Gold*, 2022, wood and glitter. Photography: Caleb Wood



Figure 14: John Saurer, *All That Glitters Is Not Gold* (detail), 2022, wood and glitter. Photography: Caleb Wood

His most recent installation, *All That Glitters Is Not Gold* [Figure 13], is a confluence of past works that contemplate one’s time and place in the world. The title appeared to Saurer and prompted the creation of this eight-foot circular installation consisting of 110 found twigs and boughs sourced from his backyard. The artist described handpicking each piece “from the ground, at my feet.” He then carefully trimmed and manicured the fallen remains before dipping in glue and encrusting them in gold glitter. The antithetical choice of materials, one natural, one synthetic, mirrors the places that nourish his creativity. Saurer explains that he is in an “in-between space” as he nears the end of a thirty-year teaching career with plans to relocate to the Montana landscape—a place he also considers home. In such a milestone shift, a long hard reflection on life is inevitable. This piece marks neither a departure nor an arrival, but the cathartic and vulnerable space of recalling memories, achievements, and losses. The smoke-and-mirrors nature of the title speaks to the appearance of a shimmering surface that covers the ungroundedness of transitions.

Although this installation resonates on a micro level, it reverberates beyond the personal references to the much larger issues facing our climate. The immensity of the environmental crisis is beyond the capability for an individual to process. As much of society is in denial about the realities unfolding in front of us, *All That Glitters Is Not Gold* speaks to this anesthetization. Saurer’s fake gilding over decayed branches candy-coats the atrocities being inflicted on the natural world. The dizziness of the factitious reflections comment on our current cultural experience of linear time and short-term thinking. What is being asked of us lies underneath—where time is slowed, marked by rings, and requires the acknowledgement of our tiny place in the cyclical tempo of deep ecological time.

All That Glitters Is Not Gold is a tributary, from personal transitions of time and place to the expansiveness and glacial pacing of the natural world. However, when working with opposites there is a potential for a third meaning to come into being. Perhaps Saurer’s work is an honest meditation and celebration of life with all its disjointed complexities and golden sweetness.

A Walking Tour of the Anders V Nien-Staedt

Elevation: 276 m / 906 ft

Time: 2 hours

Difficulty: Moderate

Andy Sturdevant

The estates of **the Anders V Nien-Staedt** (“new place” in German; compare to the Greek *utopia*, “no place,” and *eutopia*, “good place”) are some of the best-known examples of contemporary utopian/eutopian architecture in the Upper Midwest of the United States. The full name of the Anders V Nien-Staedt can roughly be translated as “human (*andro*) new site (*nien-staedt*).” The specific meaning of the interstitial “V” is lost to history, though it is speculated that it derives from this location being the “fifth site,” after earlier efforts in Iron Mountain, MI and still earlier sites in Northfield, MN; Madison, WI; and elsewhere.

The original builders’ distinctive use of materials such as bent plywood is easily observed. However, this ambiguous non-place offers a much richer and, frankly, more puzzling experience to those who take the time to properly examine these unique built environments.



Figure 15: Anders Nienstaedt, *Installation View*, 2022, cardboard tubes, gouache on corrugated pad, gouache on cardboard with wood.
Photography: Caleb Wood



Figure 16: Anders Nienstaedt, *Utopian Structure*, 2022, gouache on corrugated pad. Photography: Caleb Wood

This brief walking tour outlines some of the most notable structures one might encounter in the area. You are urged to use caution to not overexert yourself, and to utilize the seating provided to rest as needed.

Like the Shaker communities of nineteenth-century New England and the Midwest, the Nien-Staedt is known for its furniture. Indeed, a pair of chairs overlooking the Nien-Staedt Ridge is the first site we encounter on our tour: one functional, one a hollow suggestion of a chair [Figure 15]. Like Shaker furniture, however, this association of functional minimalism with the broader utopian society that originated it is somewhat reductive when viewed in its entire cultural and historical context. Thought for some time to indicate “sustainability” and responsible stewardship of dwindling resources by reusing bulk containers originally used in food service, more contemporary readings of classic Nien-Staedt furniture instead betray a more ambiguous relationship to these supposedly virtuous concepts. Traditionally, at Nien-Staedt sites, a functional chair would always be paired alongside a non-functional chair. These appear as a gaping maw, perhaps a reminder to the sitter of the void from which they came, or the void to which they are headed. *(Note: Please do not sit in the non-functional chair. We assume no liability for injury or property damage sustained as a result of sitting in the non-functional chair.)*

Next, please direct your attention to the abandoned architectural forms which loom over the horizon [Figure 16]. The Nien-Staedt is one of the few places in the world where structures can be viewed isometrically, giving the buildings an eerie, distorted quality. Historians are divided on whether this particular cluster of buildings was ever actually inhabited. The markings on the building—murals, perhaps, or evidence of normal urban wear and tear—indicate some lived-in quality. Similarly, satellite dishes and hanging blankets are scattered throughout. However, the empty, arched windows, devoid of any sign of habitation, may tell us more about the ambitions of the builders than the lives of anyone who might have lived there. Some historians have posited the unlikely (though certainly not impossible) scenario that the architects of these cavernous structures were terrified by the suggestion of an unknown cataclysm that seems to have been built into the forms—so terrified, in fact, that once completed, they never allowed people to live in these buildings to begin with. What is tidier and more utopian, after all, than the complete absence of humans? A view of these buildings from above, now entombed in smooth, bent plywood, bids us to ask these questions.

Next segment is 4.5 miles. A restroom is available at the base of the ridge.

