

## WIL ABALLE ART PROJECTS PRESENTS



*"Global Best Beauty" - as branded, thanks to Margot, 2019*

**JEREMY LAING**

*"New Work"*

March 7 – April 18, 2020

## ABOUT THE WORKS

Text by David Balzer

In what we call the West, under what we call capitalism, it can be startling when things without breath appear to come alive. This might be because we are surrounded by more manufactured things than we have been, with these things being at least once removed from the human hand, made with the aid of machines, or with the aid of artificial intelligence that moves these machines. If in the past we were grounded to the thing-world through what Karl Marx has called the labour theory of value, where we could gauge the worth of something through the amount of socially necessary work required to make it, accelerated capitalism erases the (often exploited) labour that drives it. The result is a kind of haunting. “Man [sic] never knows how anthropomorphic he [sic] is,” wrote Goethe a few centuries ago.

In 1946, George Orwell made fun of art writers who use phrases such as “living quality” to describe artwork. He thought it was meaningless. Yet it is true that Jeremy Laing’s work has a living quality and that this is meaningful. Laing’s things look alive because either they look like other things that are made and manipulated by human hands in order to help things function, or because they look like other things that are alive. Sometimes, both. Laing has been working in ceramics lately to create hard, glazed anchors for the soft parts of his sculptures. Some of these ceramics resemble large buttons, which serve the partial purpose of reminding us what buttons actually do, in addition to decorating—hold things together. Other ceramics are oversized hooks, and they do the thing hooks do, hold things up, but they are not hidden as hooks often are.

Laing also repurposes samplers from the design and beauty industries. A fabric swatch peeks out like a small appendage. Swizzle stick-like fake nails are fanned out in a spectrum of colours and patterns. Synthetic hair of various shades and hues is bundled in mini-ponies on an oversized keychain. These samplers, seen in the manufacturing and business worlds as tools for imagining something more complete, are, in Laing’s imagining, complete in and of themselves, kinds of organisms. When you put something on display in a gallery you try to make it as much like an object as possible: do not touch it. When you put something on display in a retail context you try to make it as much like a creature as possible: touch it, make friends with it, take it home. To touch Laing’s creatures would be to disrupt their delicate ecology. Still, they feel a bit like ladies in waiting.

Yes, it is queer. The soft parts go through and over the hard parts, which they resemble. The insides are on the outside. Laing uses the rope from cushion welting (lumpy, intestinal) to thread his ceramics. A dog toy is deployed as a readymade to look like a pair of low-hangers. And et cetera. “I never wanted to paint but hoped... that I might become an *objet trouvé* in the world of art,” wrote Quentin Crisp, whose old mattress ticking was, months after his death, made into a coat by fashion designer Miguel Adrover. If Laing’s works could talk, they might clap in approval.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

**JEREMY LAING** is an artist making work and community in Toronto.

[jeremylaing.com](http://jeremylaing.com)

*TBD (Their Baubled Digits), with thanks to Serge, 2020*

Hair ornaments and the artist's headphones, steel rod, nails

24" H x 24.5" W x 2.5" D approximately; dimensions variable depending on installation



*“Aggressive Chewers Premium” – as listed, 2019*

Glazed stoneware and dog toys, screws

80.5” H x 8” W x 8.5” D approximately; dimensions variable depending on installation



*“Aggressive Chewers Premium” – as listed (detail), 2019*

Glazed stoneware and dog toys, screws

80.5” H x 8” W x 8.5” D approximately; dimensions variable depending on installation



*Swat Pot for Three, 2020*

Glazed stoneware, fly swatters, upholstery piping core (with thanks to Abby), screws  
52.5" H x 15.5" W x 8" D approximately; dimensions variable depending on installation



*Captive Vessel, 2019*

Glazed stoneware and found yarn, screws

80.75" H x 49.5" W x 25" D approximately; dimensions variable depending on installation



*Captive Vessel* (detail), 2019

Glazed stoneware and found yarn, screws

80.75" H x 49.5" W x 25" D approximately; dimensions variable depending on installation



*Accessorized Single-Sitting Sampler, 2018-2020*

Found yarns on monkscloth on panel, glazed stoneware, upholstery piping core (with thanks to Abby), screws

45" H x 10" W x 2.25" D



*Accessorized Single-Sitting Sampler (detail), 2018-2020*

Found yarns on monkscloth on panel, glazed stoneware, upholstery piping core (with thanks to Abby), screws

45" H x 10" W x 2.25" D



*"Hollow Habits, for Liz" – the first gay I ever knew, 2020*

Glazed stoneware, dyed monkscloth used as shipping blankets for the work in this show, previously used as table cloths and as picnic ground covering

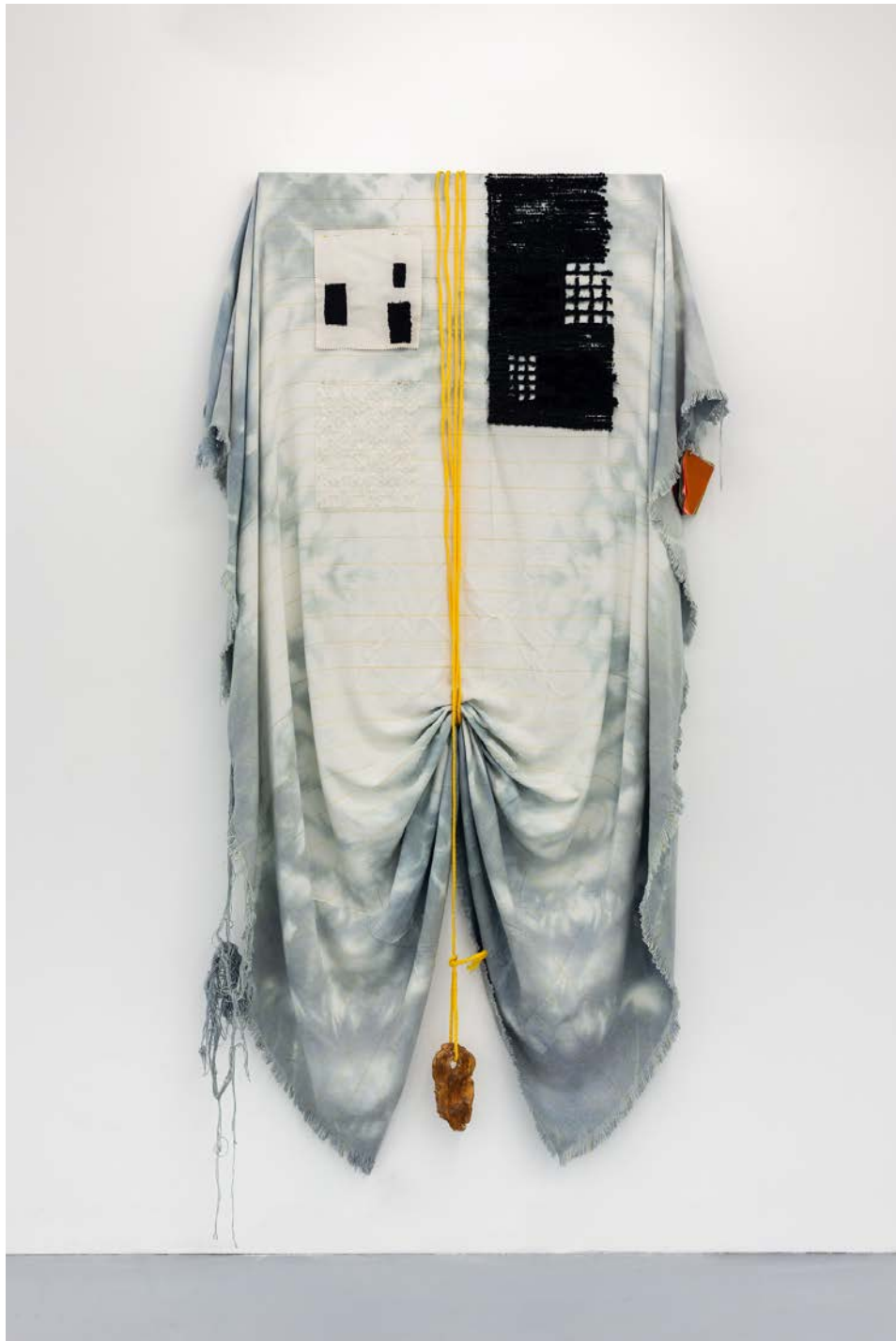
16" H x 16" W x 17.5" D approximately; dimensions variable depending on installation



*"Baby's First Mood Bod" – my poetry dealer, 2019*

Archival samples, swatch bundle, found yarns, dyed monkscloth, dressmaker's pins, glazed stoneware, nylon rope (with thanks to Pony), staples, screws

74.5" H x 40.5" W x 4.75" D



*Scrap Notions, 2019-2020*

Glazed stoneware, upholstery piping core (with thanks to Abby), nail  
81" H x 58" W x 30.5" D approximately; dimensions variable depending on installation



*Accessorized Single-Sitting Sampler, 2018-2020*

Found yarns on monkscloth on panel, glazed stoneware, upholstery piping core (with thanks to Abby), screws

49" H x 10" W x 2.5" D



*Accessorized Single-Sitting Sampler (detail), 2018-2020*

Found yarns on monkscloth on panel, glazed stoneware, upholstery piping core (with thanks to Abby), screws

49" H x 10" W x 2.5" D



*"Global Best Beauty" – as branded, with thanks to Margot, 2019*  
Glazed stoneware, dyed hair sample ring, screws  
17.5" H x 6.5" W x 8.25" D



*Captive Vessel, 2019*

Glazed stoneware, upholstery piping core (with thanks to Abby), nail  
80" H x 7" W x 4" D approximately; dimensions variable depending on installation



*Pattern Painting Sculpture, 2020*

Glazed stoneware, acrylic paint, found yarns on monkscloth on stretcher, upholstery piping core (with thanks to Abby), staples, nail  
69" H x 22.5" W x 2.25" D



*Pattern Painting Sculpture (detail), 2020*

Glazed stoneware, acrylic paint, found yarns on monkscloth on stretcher, upholstery piping core (with thanks to Abby), staples, nail  
69" H x 22.5" W x 2.25" D



*New Nails Festoon, with thanks to Diana, 2020*

Acrylic paint on glazed stoneware, nail polish on nail swatches, binding rings, screws  
66.25" H x 12" W x 12.5" D



*New Nails Festoon, with thanks to Diana (detail), 2020*

Acrylic paint on glazed stoneware, nail polish on nail swatches, binding rings, screws  
66.25" H x 12" W x 12.5" D



*Single Sitting Sampler*, 2018  
Found yarns on monkscloth on panel  
12" H x 9.25" W x 2.5" D

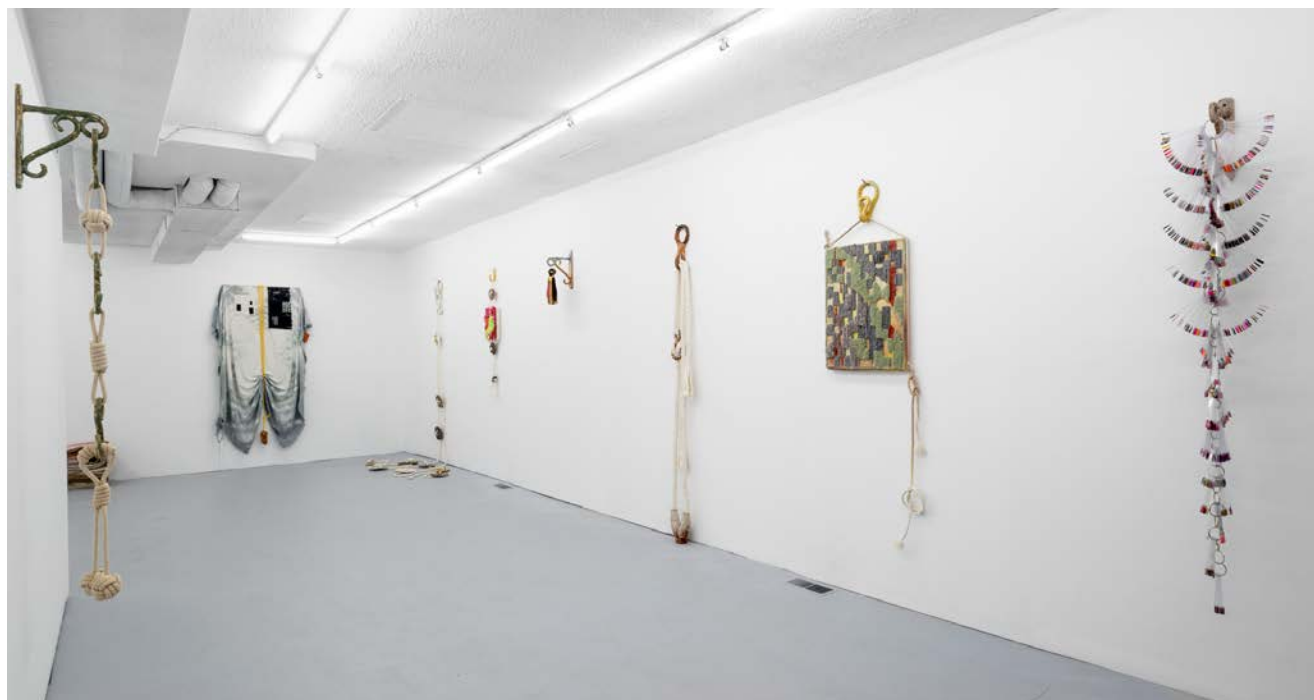


*Single Sitting Sampler, 2018*  
Found yarns on monkscloth on panel  
12" H x 9.25" W x 2.5" D



*Single Sitting Sampler, 2018*  
Found yarns on monkscloth on panel  
12" H x 9.25" W x 2.5" D







# JEREMY LAING

## SOLO AND COLLABORATIVE EXHIBITIONS

- 2020      *"New Work"*, Wil Aballe Art Projects, Vancouver, Canada
- 2019      *Virginia's Room*, Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Toronto, Canada  
(in collaboration with the Estate of Will Munro)
- 2011      *Jeremy Laing*, Royal Ontario Museum, Patricia Harris Gallery of Textiles and  
Costume, Toronto, Canada. Presentation of new acquisition to the permanent  
collection.
- 2005-2015      Twice yearly clothing collections presented during Fashion Week in New York  
and Toronto
- 2004      *Extensions for Daily Perseverance*, Solo Exhibition, Toronto, Canada  
*The Westside Stiches Couture Club T-Shirt Relay*, Art Metropole, Toronto,  
Canada  
*Toronto Exchange Club*, Parlour Projects, Brooklyn, New York
- 2003      *Virginia Puff-Paint*, Zsa Zsa Gallery, Toronto, Canada  
(in collaboration with Will Munro) Granpalazzo, Valentin, Rome, IT.

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2020      *Queer Threads*, Katzen Arts Centre, American University, Washington, DC,  
USA  
*TBC*, Grinnell College Museum of Art, Grinnell, Iowa, USA
- 2018      *The World According to GARP*, Franz Kaka, Toronto, Canada
- 2017      *Coat of Many Colours*, The Loon, Toronto, Canada
- 2016      *Chroma Lives*, 21 Avenue Road, Toronto, Canada
- 2004      *Sinbad and the Rented World*, Art Gallery of York University, Toronto, Canada  
*Explosion LTTR: Practice More Failure*, Art In General, New York, New York  
*Pinata Party*, It Can Change at Passerby at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New  
York  
*Clothing Project*, It Can Change at Bait and Tackle, San Francisco  
*Sorry for the Inconvenience*, Junction Arts Festival, Toronto, Canada

2003      *The Michael Jackson Show*, Zsa Zsa, Toronto, Canada  
*Instant Gratification*, Art Metropole at Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto, Canada  
*Phantom Head*, Virus Arts, Toronto, Canada  
*Drawing Attention*, Spin Gallery, Toronto, Canada

2002      *Fashion Queen*, Spin Gallery, Toronto, Canada

## SCREENINGS

2011      *Inside the Pavillion of Virginia Puff-Paint*, Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
Curated by AA Bronson as part of *Queer Cinema from the Collection, Yesterday and Today*

2008      *Inside the Pavillion of Virginia Puff-Paint*, Impakt Festival, Utrecht, Holland.  
Curated by Arjon Dunnewind as part of *Multiplicity of Desires*.

2007      *Inside the Pavillion of Virginia Puff-Paint*, 53rd International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, Germany. Curated by AA Bronson as part of *Kinomuseum*.

2004      *Inside the Pavillion of Virginia Puff-Paint*, White Diamond Projects/ FACT Centre, Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool, England. Curated by Lauren Cornell as part of *The Transparent Eyeball*

*Inside the Pavillion of Virginia Puff-Paint*. Curated by Lauren Cornell as part of *Elusive Quality* at Participant Inc.

*Inside the Pavilion of Virginia Puff-Paint*. Curated by Lauren Cornell as part of Toronto Explosion, at Ocularis, Brooklyn, New York

## ARTIST PROJECTS

2019      Atmosphere for Canadian Art Social  
Art direction of Owen Pallett's album *Island*

2017-Present      *New Nails*, Co-founder of the queer fundraiser party series

2017      Mercer Union Multiplier edition

2016      *Stripes and Dots Pajamas*, in collaboration with Zin Taylor, for Fogo Island Arts

2015      Art Metropole Membership Token

- 2014 *Fan the Flames*, Curatorial project for AGO, First Thursdays  
*Hazlitt*, Art Direction of Summer and Winter print issues  
*The Politics of Fashion*, Exhibition Design, Design Exchange, Toronto  
*Artists' Book Upgrade*, Fundraiser Edition for C Magazine  
Print collaboration with Julia Dault
- 2013 Print collaboration with Vanessa Maltese  
Arts and Crafts 10th anniversary T-shirt project
- 2012 Print collaboration with Niall McClelland
- 2011 Print collaboration with Scott Treleaven
- 2011 *Everything Must Go*, Curatorial project for Art Toronto
- 2008 Print collaboration with Karen Azoulay
- 2007 *Bed of Nails*, Fundraiser Edition for Art Metropole
- 2005-2007 Costume Designer for various Toronto Dance Theatre productions
- 2003-2005 *The Westside Stitches Couture Club*, Co-founder, along with Will Munro

## ARTS BOARDS

- 2016-Present Mercer Union: A Centre for Contemporary Art, Board of Directors
- 2012-2014 The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Board of Directors

## RESIDENCIES

- 2016 Fogo Island Arts

## BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CATALOGUES

- 2019 "Touch It –Jeremy Laing", *Canadian Art*, Winter 2019 Issue
- 2013 *Pattern: 100 Designers, 10 Curators*, Published by Phaidon

- 2012 *Will Munro: History, Glamour, Magic*, Catalogue published by the Art Gallery of York University
- 2010 "The Canadian School", Jessica Johnson, *Walrus Magazine*
- 2008 *Inside the Pavillion of Virginia Puff-Paint*, Artist's book published by the Art Gallery of York University
- 2007 "Jeremy Laing", Alexandra Palmer, *Descant*, Issue 138
- 2004 *Sinbad in the Rented World / What it Feels Like for a Girl*, Catalogue published by the Art Gallery of York University  
"Sinbad in the Rented World", R.M. Vaughan, *Canadian Art*, Volume 21, Number 3  
"Silly Side of Subversion", Sarah Milroy, *The Globe and Mail*, February 21
- 2003 *Pissing In Paris*, Self-published artist's book  
*Suite 117*, Self-published artist's book

## AWARDS

- 2014 CAFA, Womenswear Designer of the year, Toronto
- 2011 ANDAM Fashion Award Finalist, Paris, France
- 2008 Ryerson University Outstanding Recent Graduate Award
- 1998 Ryerson University President's National Entrance Scholarship

## COLLECTIONS

National Gallery of Canada Library  
Royal Ontario Museum  
Private Collections

## RECENT PRESS FOR JEREMY LAING

canadianart

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ESSAYS / FEBRUARY 4, 2019

# Touch It

When I stopped making clothes, I started exploring textiles in a different way, but I never lost my fascination with the profane sensuality of materials



Photo: Jeremy Laing.

**by Jeremy Laing**

Experiences are more valuable than things, but what is an experience except a specific arrangement of things? A cumulative and tacit understanding of varied material aspects sensually absorbed, as well as culturally mediated?

In the sense of being aids or conduits to experience, every thing is a material, and therefore innately equal. We impose value—in the eye of the beholder, in the hand of the holder, in the mind of the maker—and things remain blissfully unaware of this. They may be the truest sadists, caring not for our pleasure, but absolutely foundational to our experience of it.

When I stopped making clothes I stopped making anything at all for a brief time. And while I don't intrinsically miss anything about making clothes, I certainly was not able to leave behind the hands-on, material exploration that had always been a significant point of genesis in my artistic process.

Seeking another way of approaching textiles, after clothes, I turned to a tufting gun, a mechanical yarn-drawing tool used in commercial carpet manufacture. The resulting works—extemporaneous, sculptural yarn paintings they could be called, perhaps, though “tapestry,” “piece-of-cloth” or “sampler” will also do—are made as much to be touched as to be looked at.

It follows that, while making them, a variety of texture-appraisals and hand-feels come into play, the better to invite and invoke broad sensual experience. Readymade yarn, indeed stringlike things of any kind or description, anything that the tool can work with, suddenly became significant materials, as did the decisions that went into their making and my respective judgements about them. I stopped trusting my good taste, which of course isn't mine at all but a residue of the privilege of others—as I recall the critic and essayist Dave Hickey once putting it.

Any material will do for some yet-to-be-discovered effect but especially the material that I find most profane, since that designation is itself so rich that “beautiful” feels a bit lacking next to it. Better yet: the material has somehow been chosen by someone else, valued in ways I can only guess, and has come to me as discarded ends from other projects long passed or abandoned.

What follows are excerpts from a diary in which I have been working through impressions and feelings about materials as I encounter them.

i.

A tangle of noodle, dusty mould sprouted from its thin, twisted spine, the colour of a chino rag soaked in grey water, parched as grissini but incongruously possessed of a wet, kinky roil. Nice to fondle, pastiche deluxe, it has the unmistakable tinge of the synthetic: a perversion of good taste and less banal for it, if only it weren't an accident.

ii.

From a grab-bag of  
discarded ends  
unfolds a typecast  
chronicle of high-  
chroma femme  
aspirations—world-  
making from the  
gutter in grand  
Queer tradition.

Puppet entrails unspooled, thick but with a comedically weightless bounce, in  
a dried sang-de-boeuf, visceral but powdery as  
pigment, hydrophobic, yet a colour to stain the  
hands. Thicker than rope, but possessing no  
substance at all, it could easily thread a tapestry  
needle.

iii.

Saturated, and with the nuance of colour afforded  
bulk liquid soap. A knot of minty-fresh caterpillar,  
weighing little in the palm. Veritable chenille, this  
could only be for knitting a clinical, nightmarish  
cocoon—away from an open flame. I am attracted by  
my repulsion. Why should ugliness not be as much a  
virtue as beauty, if beauty be a virtue at all?

iv.

“Baby Coordinates”: bright, fake, flossy acrylic, collapsing the equally  
synthetic binary of gender into a casually coiled pastel curse, pink strands  
entwined with blue. Soft-edged, but no less insistent for it, a bias toward the  
poles with no space between, a map with only two places, destination and no-  
go decreed at once. A generation’s gift to the next, the baby blanket,  
concatenated invocation—pink and blue, but always pink or blue—ill-worn yet  
tucked tightly around a little body for so much longer than it takes to fall from  
use.

v.

Safety orange cord, fetishistically described by its maker in a sensual hard-sell:  
“Jet Set.” Braided firmly to avoid snagging and abrasion. Premium Husky  
Coating applied to enhance the glide and increase the abrasion resistance  
further. If you want the best in Slickness and Toughness, try Jet Set.

vi.

Today's haul: Flutter by Bouclair, a spool of drag-queen false lashes set in a sunset gradient of grenadine, bagged with Luzern Tweed, Swiss-ish, making a selling feature of sober, old-world, well-pastured provenance. Also false. Value Village, \$3.99.

vii.

Dollar store finds: curling ribbon, crimped polypropylene, the kind that would strangle a sea turtle after the presents have been opened and the fête over, in a range of deep oceanic blues. Silver Lurex thread, sharp, bright metallic-laminated foil; tangled nests of plastic raffia, the insipid hues of Easter; sisal twine, decorticated agave, perhaps the only natural fibre to be found in this temple of petroleum by-product. The unholy off-gassing incense stings the eyes.

viii.

From a grab-bag of discarded ends unfolds a typecast chronicle of high-chroma femme aspirations to be reformatted at will, world-making from the gutter in grand Queer tradition: Linie Smash Irisée Trend Collection, wispy and golden in her breakout role; Showboat, cerulean with a flinty vein; Cindy by Bouquet, dry, ropy, she's got that "cotton look"; Debbie Bliss, lofty atomic pink; Estelle Shimmer, sparkly but sophisticated, for whatever that is worth; Fixation by Cascade, the slubby matriarch with a bouclé twist; and finally, Club Soleil, an ingenue in the navy, red and white of Deauville.

ix.

Cotton—a box of baker's twine rescued street-side—undyed, loosely spun and seemingly elementary, its supposed naturalness an illusion created by a heavy history of industrialization, mercantile capitalism and subjugated labour. Coursing with coercion whether physical, economic or socially prescribed. Considered, for the bulk of history, a great luxury due to the implications of its origins and production in human and environmental terms. Today, made to be disposed of by a market happy to ignore that slavery still exists. Classic cotton, cognitive dissonance by the bale, by the spindle, by the yard.



Photo: Jeremy Laing.

x.

Fade-and-shrink resistance comes with a price: a squeaking frison of acrylic, a bone-deep full-body shiver, triggering an instant recoil while also daring a second attempt to touch. What pleasure is this—to want to feel disgust’s comfort again? The unreal colours match the synthetic feeling, each validating the other. A cheap substitute easily overshadows with qualities all its own—new pleasures—so that to wear cashmere feels like a loss.

This is an article from our Winter 2019 issue, “Pleasure.”

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## Jeremy Laing

Jeremy Laing used to make clothes and now makes things with textiles and clay. His work has been shown at Art In General (New York), Franz Kaka (Toronto), the Liverpool Biennial and MoMA (New York).



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# **WAAP | Wil Aballe Arts Projects**

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## **EXHIBITIONS**

Jeremy Laing  
March 7 – April 18,  
2020

Patryk Stasieczek  
April 23 – May 20,  
2020

## **REPRESENTED ARTISTS**

Kim Kennedy Austin  
Scott Billings  
Maegan Hill-Carroll  
Lyse Lemieux  
Ryan Quast  
Nicolas Sassoon  
Evann Siebens  
Patryk Stasieczek

## RECENT PRESS FOR WAAP

c magazine 142

### reviews

**Steven Cottingham: *Heat, Death***  
Wil Aballe Art Projects, Vancouver  
October 18 – November 17, 2018

by **Weiye Chang**

Thermodynamics is a branch of physics that studies the relationship between heat and other forms of energy. As a field of study, it emerged in tandem with the development of the steam engine, the Industrial Revolution and the zenith of European imperialism. In Steven Cottingham's exhibition *Heat, Death*, the first principle of thermodynamic theory—that energy can neither be created nor destroyed but only transformed—becomes a metaphor for reflecting on the developments of these historical moments and their lasting reverberations into the present.

Whereas a decade ago, one might plausibly have argued that climate change was primarily a technocratic problem resolvable through tweaks to existing practices—tougher fuel efficiency standards, say, or more recycling plants—today such approaches feel inadequate. We are confronted with the totality of what is yet to come (or, rather, what is unfolding as we speak). Increasingly, there is a sense that capitalism is fundamentally incompatible with a sustainable planet and furthermore that ecological violence is also a form of human violence, as has been articulated by numerous Indigenous voices over the years. When rising ocean levels displace coastal communities, for example, or when resource extraction industries are given precedence over Indigenous land rights, issues that may have once seemed remote are brought into view as inherently political and social questions of justice.

The exhibition another thermodyna of the universe. “He: state of maximum en ger be extracted to p imagined end, Cotti panying the exhibitio warding off entropy, to work for further p has two meanings, c with the death of the ship between heat a Heat is not merely a allusion to rising glol burning forests—the death we are witness

Cottingham's v growing field of disc decay, capitalism and of the convergence unto themselves? Fo bear the conceptual and structures. By re he strategically esch general. The metapl subject to perpetual t of concrete circumst



specific histories and narratives. Instead, thermodynamic principles—unchanging, universal and universally accepted—become a base upon which to re-evaluate the conditions afflicting us.

Formally, this effort manifests as a series of sculptural assemblages made from found objects and industrial materials. Cottingham's object selection, however, isn't interested in the nominative gesture of the artist or in exposing each object's social history. Rather, objects are used metonymically, as signifiers of more complex phenomena. Aluminum stands in as the material embodiment of the workings of capitalism, its heat conductivity analogizing capital's tendency to control, subjugate and strategically dissipate entropy. Throughout the gallery, prefabricated aluminum objects, including baking foil, heat sinks and extruded bars function as display surfaces for seemingly inchoate things like desiccated sea sponges, pyrolyzed bread, antifreeze reductions, a rusty bell-clapper and flat screen monitors displaying Schlieren videographs of hot air. The pristine quality of so much of the aluminum in this show—the delicate fins of the heat sinks, the creaseless foil surfaces, the sleek angles—highlights how seductive and potent capitalism is as a construct. In one work, *No failure but the properties of matter* (2018), molten aluminum has been poured over a sea sponge, collapsing its internal structural integrity and legible as a reflection on the corrosive effects of capital on organic forms of life. Floating like islands or planets in the abyss, each pairing seems to constitute a closed system of endless repetition in which energy flows back and forth between aluminum and object.

An exception to these unyielding dialectics is a mound in a front corner of the gallery, the remnants of *Value form phase transition* (2018), which was at one time a large block of ice flecked with misshapen molten aluminum. Subjected to the heat of the sun through a window and compounded by the body heat of visitors moving around the space during the opening reception, the ice block melted over the course of sev-

eral days, its water seeping beneath, pushing them upwards to form of volcanism. Paltry and exposed lumps that lay scattered atop the material of its slick surfaces, all of capitalism under environmental

Fredric Jameson once said: "to imagine the end of the world is to imagine the end of the world as we know it; judging by the apocalyptic so much anti-capitalist climate change the case today. What differentiates themes in *Heat, Death* is the magnitude of the immensity of capitalism to diversion and control, the worst as well as the panic and political panics environmental concerns Spare, restrained, quiet, it offers a solution, preferring instead to have capitalism (aluminum) as things and persons act, and work produced to disrupt its seamless

Weiwei Chang is a writer and curator

# The New York Times

**ART & DESIGN** | It's the Art Form of the Moment (but It's a Hard Sell)

By Scott Reyburn

Front Page International/European Version: Friday September 11, 2019

Arts National/North American Version: Wednesday September 18, 2019

On-line Version: Monday September 9, 2019



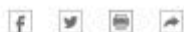
REVIEWS / OCTOBER 1, 2019

## Daniel Giordano

Wil Aballe Art Projects, Vancouver, July 25 to August 24, 2019



Daniel Giordano, *Self-Portrait 150 Years Ago*, 2017-19. Moisturizing face mask, rabbit, 24 karat gold, Tang drink mix, epoxy, wire hanger, 29.21 x 21.59 x 57.15 cm.



by Meredyth Cole

All summer, the atmosphere in Vancouver seemed about to do one of two things: condense into rain or, as is increasingly common, burst into flame. I too felt on the verge of something: nothing as euphoric as a breakdown, but some kind of unfurling, like a ball of yarn rolling down a flight of stairs. It's slightly painful, anticipation of this weight and texture. Walking into "Even Cowboys Get Caught in the Rain," Daniel Giordano's recent exhibition at Vancouver's Wil Aballe Art Projects, felt like walking into a manifestation of urban summer. The walls were lined with masks: Giordano manipulated common sheet masks used for moisturizing by deep frying or glazing them, adorning them with, among other things, eagle excrement and gold leaf, and encircling them with halos of wire or augmenting them with drips of Murano glass.



<https://canadianart.ca/reviews/daniel-giordano/>

Giordano's materials were, in a way, random—detritus collected from the bank of the Hudson River, where the artist lives. But they were also pointed: Sheet masks are ubiquitous aspects of skin care routines—they exist to plump and moisturize the skin, to slow the aging process. In Giordano's hands, these instruments of beauty became death masks, almost like Dorian Gray portraits, expressing all the withering and grotesqueness that skin care promises to prevent.

Why did this feel like summer? Because summer is a youthful, childish season, one that dimly reminds us that we are no longer children. It is both nostalgic and excruciating. The sun is notoriously aging. Summer is anticipation that never seems to coalesce into what was anticipated. When it does, we have magic on our hands.



Daniel Giordano, *Self-Portrait 150 Years from Now*, 2018-19. Moisturizing face mask, cuttlefish ink, dust, acrylic, polymer emulsion, urinal cake, epoxy, wire hanger, 39.37 x 30.48 x 17.78 cm.

If Giordano's show was summer made manifest, it was fittingly juvenile. This is not a criticism. There were several paintings exhibited alongside the sculptures, featuring people with cartoonish, phallic noses being furiously rubbed. With the sculptures, the artist seemed to work like a child making "science experiments" with kitchen pantry items. The watercolours struck me as hilarious, Freudian dreams.

Something else about summer—everyone looks better slicked in sweat. Sheet masks moisturize and promise the coveted “glow” that verges on greasiness. Giordano’s grotesque, face-like sculptures looked organic and infectious; some were singed, others glistened with resin. Summer has always embodied the ineffable balance between dirt and beauty that is, to me, the definition of sexiness. Like summer, the work was also undeniably erotic—“goat skin cock rings” were a material listed. In this case, however, eroticism had a refreshing and joyous, even puerile, glow.

Let me be clear, though: these were sculptures doused in piss, smears of lipstick and resinous goop. It was impossible to ignore that they were composed largely of river garbage. There is a sense that Giordano is revelling in the underbelly of the beauty industry, where it’s increasingly hard to ignore the fact that the things that beautify also devastate. By presenting human waste as semi-religious, bodily talismans, Giordano evoked a celebratory, hedonistic fervour. This is what a mystery rite might look like at the end of the world. This is what Dionysus is today, a god of garbage with the sensibility of a magpie. These masks look half-melted, as I often imagine a polar ice cap, these days, must be. It does not seem like an inappropriate response to slather garbage in gold leaf and try to have some fun.

Summer is endless waiting, and Giordano’s show reminded me of the glorious nature of going slightly nuts in the heat.



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Daniel Giordano, *Self-Portrait as my Brother as the Weeper Who Weeps Under the Weeping Willow*, 2018-19. Moisturizing face mask, lady bugs, glazed ceramic, iron ore, Murano glass, limestone, strawberry Nesquik powder, debris, epoxy, phosphorescent acrylic, urine, wire hanger, 35.56 x 25.4 x 30.48 cm.



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