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Harrison, Rachel & Robert Enright. "Pink Delay: An Interview with Rachel Harrison." *Border Crossings*, September 2025: 44–59. (cover)

Pink Delay

An Interview with Rachel Harrison

by Robert Enright

Rachel Harrison is one of the most satisfying and vexing artists working today. Her sculptures are irresistible, improbable and puzzling assemblies of things and materials. They shouldn't add up to passable works, but somehow her arrangement turns them into surpassing art. To do that she seems to enter a zone I would be inclined to call magical, but there is something in Harrison's imagination that absolutely resists being inexplicable. Listening to her talk about her work makes it seem inexorable, even obvious. You wonder, why didn't I think of that, and then, that's the only way you can think about it.

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Rachel Harrison, *Scepter* (detail), 2025, wood, polystyrene, cardboard, chicken wire, burlap, cement, enamel, acrylic, Converse Chuck Taylor All Star sneakers, Uline dolly and Panasonic KX-TG5431 telephone with answering machine, 235 × 213.4 × 104.1 centimetres. Photo: Genevieve Hanson. All images courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York.

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In the interview that follows she mentions a wide range of artists, including Mike Kelley, Bruce Nauman, Anne Truitt, Jeff Koons, Dan Flavin, Adrian Piper, Yves Klein and Willem de Kooning. But she singles out for specific praise Fred Sandback because of the pleasure he provides in "being able to make so much with so little." In a way, her appreciation is a case of liking what she is not. She has acknowledged his influence in her own work. In an exhibition called "More News," 2016, a collection of Trump-head piñatas were arranged in a gallery defined by a linear framework, and in an earlier exhibition in 2014 she composed "framing devices" that contained and activated objects within a structure of lines. Even with these gestures, Sandback's space-defining minimalism is not her natural approach.

While she is not exactly a maximalist, the number of objects and forms she includes in any one sculpture is considerable. It is not only what she uses but how she uses them that makes the sculpture impossible to overlook. Her work is inclined to keep the viewer off-balance, which is the disposition of many of the sculptures themselves. *Scepter*, 2025, is a study in instability; a pair of grey Converse Chuck Taylor All Star sneakers hangs on a staff of coloured wood that crowns the top of the piece, while the entire sculpture tilts precariously forward on a Uline dolly, only two wheels of which touch the ground. *Scepter* is an intense purple, and underneath the base is a colour-matched Panasonic telephone and answering machine. I can't imagine what it is doing there; she didn't tell me and I didn't ask.

There is no evident limit or restriction on what she includes in any of her sculptures. Her sensibility is uncompromisingly democratic and anti-hierarchical; anything can go in and everything seems to have equal significance. There are exceptions, but they are only suggestions you can either ignore or take as a clue. These things turn up: cardboard, chicken wire, a USB flash drive, burlap, a candle, a soccer ball, packing peanuts, plastic, push pins, steel, polystyrene, glass bottles, mannequins, masks, necklaces, sunglasses, screws, fake peaches, bejewelled barrettes and a can of air freshener. Making art, for her, is a process of accumulation; "I have to remain engaged, so I keep adding things." That method does two things: it satisfies her own additive inclination, and it considers the welfare of the things she makes. She says, "When putting together a public exhibition, I like there to be some through lines for artworks to talk to each other." All her exhibitions have a lot of talking going on. They are noisy, even boisterous.

Harrison has resisted any narrative impulse—she says she's not here to tell stories—as well as any tendency to read her vertical sculptures as anthropomorphic. *The Excavator*, 2023, departs slightly from the rules in that it suggests something close to the posture of a character. It's a series of geometric shapes stacked on and attached to one another, in a pastel palette of yellow, green, pink and turquoise that peeks through the rough cement surface. It's all very muted, with the exception of one side where she adds "a little bit of showy spray paint," interrupting the low colour saturation. She calls it "vandalizing." At the base a pair of what might be square-toed feet appears, and a rusty shovel leans against the body of the sculpture. Her description of what the sculpture is saying is an indication of the kind of associations she makes: "In the past I was more adamant that my forms were fully abstract, but with the shovel it can't not be about labour, unearthing—maybe he dug up a grave." So we've settled into the gothic, but the tone has a touch of humour. (Harrison's work is often hilarious; she's like a stand-up comic who tries out things just to see how people will react to them.) But she won't leave us lying in scary ground, so she keeps adding things on to the gravedigger reading: "An excavator is also a versatile machine; you can use it for landscaping or demolition. It can destroy things or build them. *The Excavator* can uncover or reveal what's there. This doesn't take away what happened because scars and trauma leave residue." In telling us about her sculpture, she is describing what the imagination is and how it functions: like the excavator, the imagination is a versatile machine that can reveal scars and trauma, that both builds and destroys. There is nothing puzzling, then, in her declaration that "I like the idea that a sculpture could contradict itself."

The following conversation was conducted by phone to Brooklyn on Friday, June 27, 2025.

BORDER CROSSINGS: I'm interested in knowing how artists become artists. It didn't seem immediately apparent to you that art was the road you wanted to go down. And, more specifically, you said that early on you didn't even like sculpture. So how was it you ended up so thoroughly occupying Sculptureland?

RACHEL HARRISON: I'm still not sure I like sculpture. I'm not sure why I said that, but it probably had to do with my lack of interest in traditional sculpture. I was always drawn to Mike Kelley and Bruce Nauman, who continue to be two of my favourite artists. Sculpture is hard to talk about, since it encompasses other media, and it could be tougher for people to know how to look at something that isn't a picture on the wall—something that occupies the same space in the room as a body but isn't a lamp or a chair. At any rate, as a kid, I drew a lot, did ceramics, photography, developed my own pictures in black and white. I liked art; I painted a de Kooning Woman on a rotary telephone for a high school art assignment. I just didn't think I was an artist. I thought if you were an artist you'd know; you got tapped on the shoulder. I was born in 1966, not into an art family, and wasn't really aware you could be an artist, as a woman, even though I wrote a book report in high school on Frida Kahlo and knew who Helen Frankenthaler was from watch ads. I also lacked confidence, which of course has something to do with being a woman, especially at that time. The other thing is that art is really very hard to make; not everybody should make it. It wasn't until I was in my 20s when I found it was something I needed and wanted to do, and that I would figure out a way to do it.

In the late '90s you started collecting things: cans of green peas and black olives and rubber wrestlers, and you had a collection of honey bears. Were you a weird collector or were you already thinking like an artist and realizing that these things could end up in a piece of sculpture?

All those collections were assembled as materials for artworks. I wasn't a collector for myself, and I'm still not a collector. I like nature—trees and mountains—stuff you can't collect. My canned pea collection came from thinking—I hate to say this—about the semiotics of objects. If you look at the way food is mass-marketed, you see a photograph that someone took on the label. The wrapper

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has photography and design to show what isn't there. You have this inside-outside thing. So I opened a can of peas to photograph the interior—the peas themselves. Is there truth in advertising? No, but that wasn't the point. The label had peas in this wonderful green colour, very appealing, and the peas inside didn't match. They'd never sell if the packaging was accurate. Those early explorations (and that one in particular, as ridiculous as it sounds) came from my growing interest in conceptual photography. I had been working in 35 millimetre and was more interested in photojournalism than art. Reading Douglas Crimp on Sherrie Levine changed that. The picture over his bed was like the label. Those cans of green peas went in an entirely different direction. I never exhibited the photographs, just the objects in a room-sized sculpture from 1996, *Should home windows be required to withstand a direct hit from an eight-foot-long two-by-four shot from a cannon at 34 miles an hour, without creating a hole big enough to let through a three-inch sphere?* Generally, I work out ideas for artworks this way, working through and around them, kind of like sketching.

Cans of black olives do end up in *Teaching Bo to Count Backwards* (1996–97). Then in 2004 Big John Studd turns up in *Pretty Discreet*, so you employ one of your rubber wrestlers. Why did you decide to collect rubber wrestlers in the first place? In 1984 when they go plastic, you don't like them, but you liked them when they're rubber.
When I moved to New York, Salvation Armys and flea markets were still all over the city; stuff was cheap, so you'd come across random things of little value. I was looking at some used children's toys and must have noticed the dates of the transition from rubber to plastic. I've never watched a wrestling match in my life, but in the early aughts I started buying these rubber WWF toys on eBay because of the intense caricatures of race and identity. Never did I think the CEO of the World Wrestling Federation would be appointed the US Secretary of Education, but that's another matter. Anyway, somewhere in the studio I still have a tub filled with this set of characters sotted with clichés, horrific stereotypes and bad taste. At that time, I kept coming back to Big John Studd being the most American. He is literally like a flag.

I want to use *Pretty Discreet* to talk about a logic of making. I'm interested in your sequence of inclusion, because there are consequences if you include a second sculpture inside the larger sculpture. You can decide whether it gets lifted, and if you make that decision, you have to decide who lifts it and suddenly Big John Studd comes into the event. And if Big John comes in, he will have to work hard, so he's going to perspire, which means you have to include an air freshener. So there's the causal logic. I guess the piece of information that completes the logic for me is whether you decided that the sculpture within the sculpture had to be lifted. I know you think of the work as a wall, but once you had that structure, how does everything else enter in?
So we're calling the pink part a sculpture, and we're calling the whole thing a sculpture—does that make it an assemblage

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of sculptures? Sounds like you're projecting onto the wrestler the possibility that he's actually a man who can lift that pink sculpture. You've chosen my most "logical" work to dissect! I fight a normative narrative impulse in artmaking; I'm not here to tell stories. A man lifting something massively bigger than he needs to make the air smell better is not a tale to tell, but it would be a challenge since the air freshener is so far away. Maybe he doesn't even know it's there. Maybe it's an existential problem: Is the man free to climb out of the lattice when he's pinned down by this pink frosted thing? And since he's a wrestler, it's all staged and he doesn't have the ability to decide for himself, and if he stinks, he can't reach the can, but even if he could, it isn't in the script.

But you carry through the logic of connecting to Big John Studd because in *Silent Account* (2004), you put weightlifting magazines under the staircase. The only reason they would be weightlifting magazines is because you've got a wrestler in the room and you've got to give him something to read.
That's true. Big John Studd was a big reader. When putting together a public exhibition, I like there to be some through lines for artworks to talk to each other. As you picked up, that is how *Pretty Discreet* and *Silent Account* are linked. The titles are also related: most of the artworks in that show were named after racehorses. Pretty Discreet won the Alabama; that makes her sort of famous in that world. Those two sculptures also have formal connections. They're both made from wood and another material that's painted, so you could call that "assemblage." Only the spines of the weightlifting magazines can be seen, and you'd need to crouch down to the floor to read them. It's more like mental weightlifting.

And what is under the staircase? Your sculptures are often enigmatic because the viewer is trying to figure out what is inside an object.
The magazines raise the staircase on one side and they also level it, like a matchbook shimmed under a restaurant table. There is the suggestion of space inside—it could be hollow, which I think is what you are getting at. Over the years people have asked if my forms are hollow; some in fact are just a shell.

Another piece that I admire is also a wall piece, and that's *Marilyn with Wall*. It took on a number of variations. The common element in all the versions is the photograph Warhol used as the prototype for his *Marilyn* paintings. But what keeps changing is the nature and configuration of the wall to which the photograph is attached. As that piece moves from exhibition to exhibition, it changes every time. Did you realize how versatile *Marilyn with Wall* could be and that you could remake it so many different times?
An artwork can generate an idea for the next work, and when I made *Marilyn with Wall* I immediately wanted to make it again,

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1. ***Coral Corridor***, 2025, wood, polystyrene, cardboard, cement, acrylic and shovel, 209.6 × 67.9 × 58.4 centimetres. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.

2. ***Balaenopteridae***, 2025, wood, cardboard, polystyrene, cement and acrylic, 285.8 × 121.9 × 78.7 centimetres. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.

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1. Installation view, "The Friedmann Equations," 2025, Greene Naftali, New York. Photo: Zeshan Ahmed.

2. ***Winged Victory*** (detail), 2017, scaffold, plexiglass, Winged Victory of Samothrace, flocking, polystyrene, papier-mâché, steel, acrylic, wood, plastic, metal stanchion, parachute cord, candle, aluminum foil, biodegradable packing peanuts and pencil, 204.5 × 591.82 × 342.9 centimetres. Photo: Jason Mandella.

elsewhere. I am still not done with this piece. Each time I make a new *Marilyn with Wall*, it mutates as it adapts to the site. For the first one in 2004 I took down all the non-weight-bearing walls in the gallery—an archive masquerading as a trash pile—and hung the framed photograph on it. When I was invited to remake the work for a group show at the National Museum in Oslo (when it was still housed in a historic building), I couldn't take down walls because they reused temporary walls for each show. Very European, much less wasteful. I asked for a picture of the wall where my work would be situated, and they sent a cellphone image of a wall with a painting hanging on it. I made that into a wall mural and hung the *Marilyn*. Really, she looks good almost anywhere.

You say you always try to put layering in the work. Is that a conscious determination, or does it just happen in the making?
When I'm making an artwork, I have to remain engaged, so I keep adding things. For a while things work, but then I get restless and want to see how much I can push it. So I move things around a lot: the objects move, they shift around the room, the forms get cut up and rearranged. After something is removed it's still there after it's gone, like a ghost or afterimage. I think of it like cooking soup: at the start you add a bay leaf but take it out when it's served. Since I don't start out with a drawing or idea, there is no way to know where it goes.

So when you say that you can't know what something is until you make it, that you have no idea what it is when you start it, and you don't even know what it is when you finish it, you're telling the truth? You're talking about a thoroughgoing epistemology of doubt.
Isn't an epistemology of doubt common to many artists? If you've got it right, why make another work?

Every Sculpture Needs a Trap Door **(2017) is the name of a sculpture that also addresses a methodology, a way of making that eludes getting trapped. That strikes me as a piece that describes how you work and what your work does.**
Different sculptures need and do different things. This title is particularly rewarding because of what you just said about it. When I used Andrea Fraser's essay "Why Does Fred Sandback's Work Make Me Cry?" in that artwork, I wasn't sure how casual it should look. Any text becomes a wall label. I wanted it to seem like I just printed it out to read in the studio and left it sitting on the pedestal, which is pretty much what I did. Then one day I had an iced coffee and mindlessly left it on the printed papers; it made a stain and the text started to run. The tracks of my caffeinated tears. Emotion is intrinsic to art, but it could also be a trap. When we were talking on the phone for this interview, I mentioned something Louise Bourgeois wrote about her feelings being so big she had to make sculpture to contain them. Now as I reread it, I want to find the quote, to see how she phrased it, but I can't. Maybe I made it up? I found this from her instead: "When you are really depressed and have no other way out except suicide, sculpture will get you out of it."

Sandback turns up in your work in other places. In "More News," your exhibition in 2016, a Trump head is surrounded by Sandbackian lines.
Yeah, that head is a piñata. All the Trumps are piñatas. They are framed and hung by coloured parachute cord. I've always loved Sandback's work. In part it's the pleasure of being able to make so much with so little, that it's possible to fill a museum with a piece of string and be struck by unbounding beauty. Few sculptors have been able to achieve that vast a range of exquisiteness

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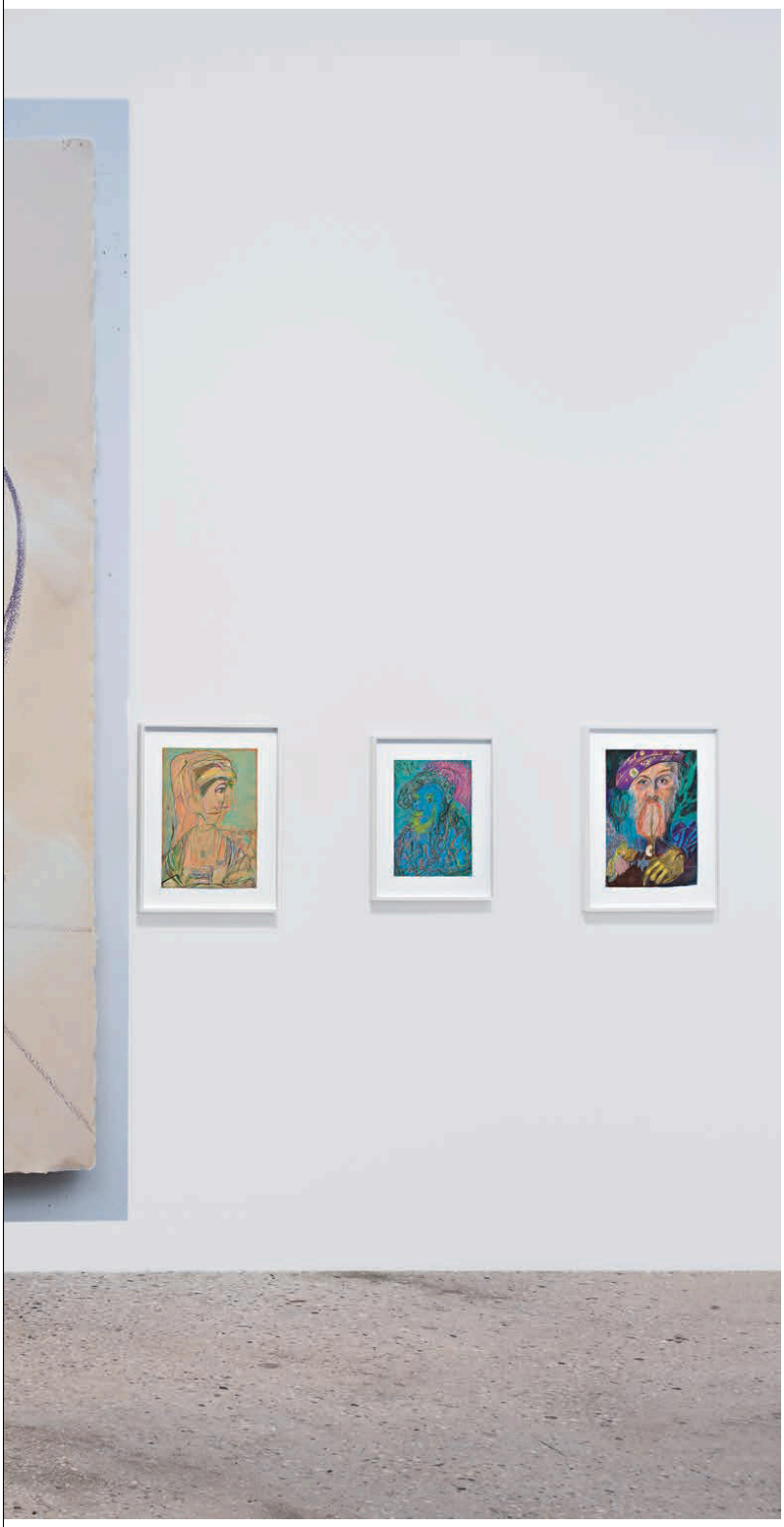

and emotion with so little. His work eats space. The entire building becomes sculpture. It changes wherever you stand in the room. Prior to "More News" I made a series of "Framing Devices" where cords are used to frame abstract forms, as other oblique homages to his work.

You've included a group of men in the 2007 exhibition, "If I Did It." I'm interested in knowing why you chose those guys and whether you think of them as a kind of portraiture.

That show was definitely not about portraiture; it was quite the opposite. This is part of my whole chicken-and-egg fascination. Over the years people have asked, "Do you start with a taxidermy rooster and then make a form for it?" There's no way to answer this question; it's a process. You're trying to get at how I make things. I made all the sculptures in that show and none of them had titles until days before a truck came to take work to the gallery. I was not thinking about Fats Domino when I put a can of SlimFast on the top of an eight-foot sculpture. I was thinking about desire, something out of reach. Or I wanted the sculpture to go on a diet. Or I thought it looked like a Louise Nevelson that someone left something on while they were painting the ceiling. Anna Nicole Smith's refrigerator was in the news at the time. She had just died, and it was filled with just methadone and SlimFast. I wasn't even sure who she was, but it was all over the news. Things didn't really go viral then, or it wasn't called that, but everyone knew about this. Still, I didn't call the sculpture *Anna*.

When I saw the hoop earring, I thought of Captain Jack Sparrow and *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and the bronze with purple highlighting is a palette for film royalty. I was reading that kind of clue in the piece, although that's not how you started out. Johnny Depp wasn't in your imagination at all when you started.

I had found a side table on the street. I don't often use furniture in my work, and I wanted to make that table bigger. So I cut another circle for the top, the same size as the table, and then thought, what if a "sculpture" went through the table? Tabletop sculpture, with a lid on it. This one got painted purple and gold—I wanted the surface to vibrate. It looked so good but was ready for an accessory; I added a gold hoop earring. In the same body of work, I accessorized another form with a thermostat. Later on, that one got called *Al Gore* (2007).

I had an inclination to make associations that had to do with cartography. You provided quotes from each of the figures, and the idea of place and

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identity seems applicable to them all. Alexander the Great's lament is that there's no more territory to conquer; Fats Domino refuses to leave his New Orleans home during Hurricane Katrina; Lévi-Strauss talks about travel; and Vespucci recounts a voyage of discovery. Then you've got 57 archival inkjet prints from *Voyage of the Beagle* (2007). You can see how I might want to build a trope of travel and place into those works. It wasn't there as you were making them, but it's something that can be applied in looking at them after they've been included in an exhibition.

Well, the *Voyage of the Beagle* has a lot to do with cartography. See first, think later. When I bought my first digital, handheld, point-and-shoot camera, I wanted to take it with me everywhere and needed a project, just for that camera. This was before the iPhone. I'd only shot with an SLR and it was liberating not to have a camera bag and carry film you could run out of. Then again, in retrospect, it also made everything too easy and for this reason I really don't take pictures for art anymore. But at the time it was great and all you had to worry about was keeping the battery charged. The first trip I took with this camera was to Corsica, really just a vacation, but I try to visit prehistoric sites whenever I'm near any, so I went to see menhirs dotted all over the island. Once I saw them, I wished I'd brought a better camera. The pictures would have been better, but taking those pictures led to the making of that work.

You have mentioned Anne Truitt. But when you stand a sculpture up against the wall, I think of women artists as different as Roni Horn and Eva Hesse. Then in *Sculpture with Boots* (2017), you include Lee Krasner's painting boots. I guess a more direct way of asking the question is, why do these artists turn up in your work?

Those are all artists I like a lot; I notice they all happen to be women. I wonder if that's what you're asking about. Over the years I've included references to many artists, living or dead, from de Kooning to Adrian Piper to Dan Flavin. Richard Serra's sculptures leaned on the wall, and John McCracken's, too. For a long time, a woman artist was not called an "artist"; she'd be called a "woman artist." You can't get away from these distinctions and labels, I guess, but as a woman I want to be referred to as an "artist."

I look at the drawings in your recent Greene Naftali exhibition and they have a beautiful fragility and a vulnerability that I hadn't been aware of before. They have an almost exquisite sense of line.

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In 2024, for a number of reasons, I was drawn to Holbein. We had an election in America, and the next day I woke up and I thought about Henry VIII. I thought about manipulating religion and murdering wives and loyalty tests and executing people, and I still think about this daily because of the political situation we're in right now. So that led to the realization that we can't have Henry VIII without Holbein because he's responsible for humanizing not only this tyrant but all of his court. Holbein couldn't paint the king as unsympathetic; he was dependent on him for his living. Henry was a big man, so Holbein painted him oversized, shoulders expanded to touch the edges of the frame—he conveyed the reaches of his power. On Wikipedia almost every person in the Tudor court is illustrated with a Holbein. Talk about history painting! I started looking at an old catalogue of Holbein's preparatory drawings in the collection at Windsor Castle. The book is from 1945, with bad reproductions in black and white, so I wasn't bogged down too much and just looked at his lines. I felt free to make things up, do what I wanted, get lost in the drawing. Many of the works that resulted

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Installation view, "The Friedmann Equations," 2025, Greene Naftali, New York. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.

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1. *viii Drawing*, 2025, coloured pencil and blue tape on velour pastel paper, 47.9 × 35.9 centimetres. Photo: Zeshan Ahmed.

2. *viii Drawing*, 2025, coloured pencil on velour pastel paper, 47.9 × 35.9 centimetres. Photo: Zeshan Ahmed.

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are composites: an ear from one guy, the nose from another, an extra set of eyes. This is definitely a carry-over from my earlier drawings called *The Classics*. Going deep into Holbein was exhilarating; he could make a mouth in a single line. It's so efficient and he used almost the same line for all of the mouths, both men and women. We don't know if vulnerability is what he saw in the sitter or what he felt himself. It was how I felt while I was drawing. Holbein painted his subjects with detail and dignity, even though the people of the court were consistently immersed in violence and fear. While living in Basel, he painted Erasmus several times. That's how he got introduced to Thomas More and then Thomas Cromwell and later the king. I've been thinking a lot about humanism lately.

One of the aspects of your work that continues to fascinate me is the Exhibition Guides. When did you start using them to accompany your exhibitions?

I made them for myself periodically, but they were loose and took the form of boxes and notebooks. The first one I exhibited in 2007 was made while installing "If I Did It." OJ Simpson's book *If I Did It* came out in 2006—do we need a refresher that he was acquitted for murdering his wife because the glove did not fit? I wanted to write my own book with the same title. Could I bump him off the *New York Times* bestseller list? The guide happened really fast in a couple of days. I made it by looking for random quotes and factoids about a work's title, even though that information had nothing to do with why I made the work. I wondered what it could mean to have an exhibition guide that led you the wrong way. Is there a right way to look at art? Anyway, I was just letting off steam while installing, and maybe I walked into the gallery's back office and said something like, "Jay, I'm calling this piece *Rainer Werner Fassbinder*," and he said, "Oh, nice, have you ever seen *The Third Generation*?" I was like, "No—let me see a picture of it." And he showed me a picture of an actor in deranged clownish facepaint holding a machine gun on his screen. I said, "Great, let's print it!" Johnny Depp reportedly said, "America is a sad puppy," which went well with another sculpture, *Amerigo Vespucci*. Then someone took the pages to Kinko's to get them spiral bound. Everyone who taught then, including myself, would make class readers by printing out pages and getting them spiral bound at Kinko's. That was the first one. The next was *The Help*, an e-book published by Paul Chan's press, Badlands. For "The Friedmann Equations" I wanted something physically there, like an object alongside work in lieu of a press release. Maybe it's another work in the show. Friedmann equations were printed on paper held by demonstrators in China to protest COVID-19 restrictions. I went looking for other protestors using alternative methods to communicate their causes—like the dairy farmers in Quebec who drove tractors into cities to block traffic. A very old woman in Turkey stopped construction by sitting in front of a bulldozer. I find these things inspiring. There are things in the guide that are red herrings but also some that come directly from a work on view, like a screenshot from *British Vogue* that had an Amazon link to buy Queen Elizabeth's favourite $27 lipstick from Elizabeth Arden.

The accompanying guides have especially interesting connections. *The Help: A Companion Guide* (2012) has two sets of double pages from different books. One is from Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana* (1958), which is a novel about a vacuum cleaner salesman who tricks MI6 into thinking he's a spy, and then he does drawings of photographs of vacuum cleaners and vacuum cords to convince the British that

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Russia is developing new kinds of technologies for war. There's a character named Hawthorne who keeps saying to himself, "I've seen these before," and the reason he's seen them before is because they're just vacuum cleaners. But the lovely thing about using Graham Greene in *The Help* is that it ties into the Hoover that turns up in the show itself. So there is a direct line that as a viewer I can trace from *The Help* as exhibition guide to the exhibition.

The chicken/egg riddle reminds me how absurd and funny that story is, and the insanity is underlined with a little fear. In college I read that Yvonne Rainer vacuumed a stage; those were the sort of works that got me into artmaking, so I was thinking about her doing that. The Hoover that shows up in *The Help* is close to what Jeff Koons used in his series "The New" (1980), which is one of my favourite works of his: vacuums sealed into boxes, never plugged in or turned on, like embryonic flies in amber.

I immediately thought of Jeff Koons when I saw your Hoover. Inescapably, I would go there as an art critic.

Which is why I thought it would be good to enter Graham Greene into the mix. The MI6 espionage in the novel and the ordinariness of a vacuum cleaner salesman is a fantastic combo for a story. It's got everything you would want; everybody has dirt on their floor that they need to get rid of, so you can relate to it. Art is long, and associations change with time. I tried to make order of the world when I arranged cans on the shelf of *Teaching Bo to Count Backwards*. But how legible is that order if you don't have the code? During the pandemic people stockpiled canned beans. When I made that *Bo* work, I was literally thinking about the shelf life of art, joking, "How long will this one last?"

Your second pair of pages in *The Help* go to Goya and his painting of *The Naked Maja* (1797–1800). The quotations are wonderful, referring to "an expression of voluptuousness that knows no laws" and telling us the body of the woman in the portrait "does not correspond to the laws of anatomy that Francisco knew so well." Those lifts from the book underline our sense that we know what the rules are, but then we break those expectations. That strikes me as being at the core of your own aesthetic. So that Goya entry also says something crucial about how you come at artmaking.

You can never learn enough from Goya. Breaking down expectations of form is what I got into. Form is the most crucial thing in artmaking; there are no laws.

The interview you do with Anne Doran that is a text for your drawing exhibition at Greene Naftali in 2020 is the most perplexing two pages of interview I've ever read. It's never clear who's asking and who's answering. Did you work that out as a collaboration with Anne?

We did it over email and it was wonderful. I think she asked me questions and I tried to answer, we both made changes; it went on like that, very fluid. We edited it together until we liked how it sounded. She's really talented as a writer as well as an artist and critic.

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I want to talk about *Winged Victory*, the piece you did in 2017. It connects to a logic of making and to a process of association. When I look at it, I see it as a piece about France, first of all, because the *Victory of Samothrace* is in the Louvre. Then there's a bottle of wine on top of it; the red and white tablecloth could be in a French cafe; the green plastic brooms could be used by Paris street-sweepers; and Victory's colour has the intensity of Yves Klein Blue. I see this work as you setting your sculptural sights on France.

First of all, I love that sculpture maybe more than any other in that body of work, so thank you for bringing it up. We've been discussing this use of artworks inside other artworks. The small statue of *Winged Victory* is based on a multiple by Yves Klein. I know about it from a show I made at S.M.A.K. in Ghent, where I was invited to use works in the museum's collection. After I left, I missed that work and wanted to make one for myself. I bought a *Winged Victory* statuette and flocked it blue. The real *Winged Victory* sits in a prominent spot at the Louvre on a giant ship-like base at the top of a giant staircase. Her head and arms are missing, and the body faces forward, framed by the symmetry of the building: an armless, headless trophy. My Nike is on wheels, also with a lot of fanfare. Some of the artifacts are not what they appear to be, like the wine bottle is a candle, no wine, just wax, you can see the wick, but you have to walk around the sculpture. Some things in it are cheap imitations of something else, like the plastic red checkerboard tablecloth. They probably have those in France.

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1. Installation view, "More News," 2016, Greene Naftali, New York. Photo: Jason Mandella.

2. *Pretty Discreet* (detail), 2004, wood, screws, polystyrene, cement, acrylic, wheels, Big John Studd WWF All-Star wrestler doll and Country Kettle air freshener, 205.7 × 320 × 67.3 centimetres. Photo: Cathy Carver.

3. *Pretty Discreet*, 2004, wood, screws, polystyrene, cement, acrylic, wheels, Big John Studd WWF All-Star wrestler doll and Country Kettle air freshener, 205.7 × 320 × 67.3 centimetres. Photo: Cathy Carver.

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1. *Lazy Hardware*, 2012, wood, polystyrene, cement, acrylic, metal stanchions, cord and glass bottles, 246.4 × 137.2 × 109.2 centimetres. Photo: John Berens.

2. *Johnny Depp*, 2007, wood, polystyrene, cement, acrylic, side table and gold earring, 188 × 61 × 58.4 centimetres. Photo: Tim Nighswander/ IMAGING4ART.

3. *Alexander the Great*, 2007, wood, chicken wire, polystyrene, cement, acrylic, mannequin, Jeff Gordon waste basket, plastic Abraham Lincoln mask, sunglasses, fabric, necklace and two unidentified items, 221 × 231.1 × 101.6 centimetres. Photo: Jean Vong.

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Your *Winged Victory* is impossibly gorgeous. And you do beautiful things with the colour in her staging; the blue scaffolding matches Victory's blue, and the packing peanuts, the sculpture stand, the bristles of the broom and the sprayed paint all are the same green colour. So there's a compelling harmony going on in your piece.
I bought the broom outside of Paris at a surplus warehouse—it's the actual broom now used to clean Parisian streets. The bristles are bright green plastic, formed to look like the straw in the brooms they used to use. The sea-green packing peanuts are biodegradable Styrofoam; they melt in water. Green packing peanuts, ecologically branded colour. Makes you feel good about using them—colour is emotion.

I'm interested in how you think about colour.
I'm never not thinking about colour. But I'm not sure what to say about it. There's a body of monochrome sculptures in my show "The Look of Dress-Separates" (1997) that kept changing colour. Colour articulates shape. I use a white Portland cement to cover an armature, so the sculptures start out all white, and when making these monochromes I gave them names: the pink one, the blue one, the orange one. Then I repainted the pink one green and the form looked much better. That's pretty abstract. I like abstraction. Whenever I see work and there's no colour—all the art is white, or all the art is black—I get jealous. It just looks so good. Maybe too good. To me, colour is challenging. Everyone is wearing beige these days, and I find it depressing, not because I don't like beige but because it demonstrates fear. That reminds me: they found bits of blue paint on the ancient *Winged Victory*. I wonder if Yves Klein knew about that. The work is often described as white marble—fine, that's what it's made of, but at one point it was painted bright colours like all Classical sculpture.

You do a beautiful job in pulling colour back in *The Excavator* (2023), which looks to me like a cross between Schwitters and Brancusi.
Some Schwitters is old and dirty now. I like a patina from time. *The Excavator* has tons of underpainting and took a long time to paint. I used creams and white-ish yellow beiges over louder undertones. I also gave into the anthropomorphic nature of that sculpture's vertical form once I found the right position for the shovel. In the past I was more adamant that my forms were fully abstract, but with the shovel it can't not be about labour, unearthing—maybe he dug up a grave. An excavator is also a versatile machine; you can use it for landscaping or demolition. It can destroy things or build them. *The Excavator* can uncover or reveal what's there. This doesn't take away what happened because scars and trauma leave residue. The layering in paint is subtle. There's a lot of white, a lot of pink and orange, some blue, there's some green. I vandalized it on one side with a little bit of showy spray paint. It's just in one part, but it infects all of it.

The central problem that sculptors come up against is what to do with the base. And you've proposed a number of solutions: *Hey Joe* (2004)

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1. ***All in the Family***, 2012, wood, polystyrene, cement, wire, acrylic paint and Hoover vacuum cleaner, 237.5 × 78.7 × 88.9 centimetres. Photo: John Berens.

2. ***Marilyn with Wall***, 2004, sheetrock, aluminum studs and chromogenic print. Dimensions variable. Photo: Oren Slor.

3. ***Pink Delay***, 2025, framed pigmented inkjet print, 56.5 × 42.5 × 3.8 centimetres. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.

4. ***Rro Sela***, 2025, framed pigmented inkjet print, 56.5 × 42.5 × 3.8 centimetres. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.

is supported by a tripod; *Sci-Fi* (2017) simply leans against the gallery wall; *Scepter* (2025) is balanced precariously on a tilted dolly. Are those determinations that you make as the piece is being made? Is it about resolution; is it about how the piece present itself in space? This whole question of what the piece sits on, what gives it a sense of gravity or lift, is critical in your sculpture. I'm wondering how you make decisions about what the base will be.

I think they arise in the process of making, the same way everything does. A base can be considered at the beginning, middle, or end—unless I make a mobile, it's got to touch the floor. Sculpture is controlled by gravity; the thing's going to fall down. I go with that. I let sculpture fall over. Sometimes I push it. I also question what a base is. There is a moral component to the word *base.* Once you start having your work on view, the base is the institution. It creates the context and then you have to wrangle with all the requirements determined by public space. I recently went to see the Empire State Plaza collection in Albany. It's work from the '60s and '70s, and they've got some really great art there. All the sculptures were sitting on these huge platforms with stanchions around them and "Do Not Touch" signs, and it made it hard to get past them. I'm certain they were not installed like that when the collection went on view in the '70s, and I assume it had to be added to protect the art. Seeing the way art is displayed over the years definitely changed my work. *Lazy Hardware* (2012) is a sculpture literally strangled with MoMA cords. I can't look at Rothko paintings under glass; it's too much. I'm thankful I made a trip to Stockholm before Rauschenberg's *Monogram* got put in a Plexi box—maybe Koons really was on to to something with "The New." I've been working on a book called *The Barrier Method* of pictures from different museums who use tape on the floor, stanchions, signs and things like that.

There is a line in William Carlos Williams's long poem *Paterso n* that posits, "No ideas but in things." In looking at your work, things are so important. But the other poet who comes to mind in thinking about your work adds an additional dimension. Walt Whitman in "Song of Myself" says, "Do I contradict myself?" and he immediately answers his own rhetorical question by saying, "Very well then I contradict myself." He accepts that notion that two possibilities can coexist simultaneously. I think of you as not just being William Carlos Williams but a little bit of Walt Whitman as well.

I like the idea that a sculpture could contradict itself.

You've said that your work has syntax and punctuation. I'd love to get an example of the syntax of making and what we can read from it.

You mentioned there are 57 photographs in the *Voyage of the Beagle*, and when I said something about syntax, it was referring to this work and how I arranged the pictures. All the photographs comprise one work: you view it left to right, like reading a sentence. A picture from the Natural History Museum of a taxidermied bighorn sheep sits next to the bronze statue of Gertrude Stein behind Bryant Park. I could speak endlessly about those two photographs together, if that's all there was, but there are 55 others, and meaning changes if the sequencing is different. Like Darwin, I had to make sense of my notes. Darwin gets on the *Beagle* and he's travelling the world; he's going to islands; he's looking at rocks and bugs and fireflies and he's taking specimens. He has to make sense of what he sees and writes it down in his notes, and his notes and observations become the book that he calls *The Voyage of the Beagle*. There's a rhythm to animal, vegetable, mineral but maybe not the same with an animatronic figure of a former president, or Beyoncé on a gold record, or a faded Kevin Bacon piece

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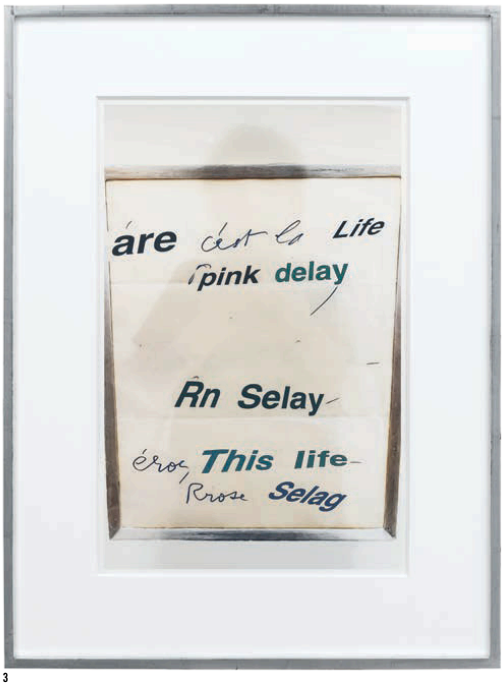
of paper. Then again, Beyoncé's round; the president is square. This one is a visual pause because it's light in colour; this one is loud. I'll put three in a row that are funny, then something more sombre. Syntax in a sculpture is more complex. It depends on the elements and I'm not sure it works the same way, but it could. I used sequential photographs in some of my early sculptures; those might have syntax.

The title of your recent exhibition at Greene Naftali, "The Friedmann Equations," refers to a way of describing the evolution of the universe over time. And the measures of that evolution are matter and energy and spatial curvature. Those are also the measures that could describe the evolution of sculpture. So your exhibition title is an articulation of your practice.

I think the show is maybe too new to speak about adequately. I'm still digesting it, but I hope the title is something that brings the work somewhere else. The works that are personally important in "The Friedmann Equations" involve the pictures I took at a Duchamp retrospective at the MMK (Museum für Moderne Kunst) in Frankfurt in 2022. I used a translation app when looking at a framed text piece by Duchamp. He wrote by hand, "Eros, c'est la vie Rrose Sélavy" three times on a piece of paper. The program was unable to read cursive and mangled the words. I discovered as I moved closer and farther from the artwork that the words changed on the screen. I was using space to make this work, so I think of it as sculpture. Sculpture expanding the universe. Much later when I looked at the pictures on my phone, I noticed I made 45 images in nine minutes, all from this one artwork, each one very different from the next with hallucinated phrases like, "Hey, it's your life and Elory." It says a lot about communication right now when everyone uses AI, just accepting the percentage of error. Maybe it's fine that we have no sense of accuracy anymore. For my show I designed an L-shaped wall that bisected the gallery, with Holbein on one side and Duchamp on the other—turning a corner, you go back 400 years.

You've always said that art is going forward and backward at the same time. So this show is a perfect embodiment of that temporal drift.

Yes, I've been thinking about that since *Alexander the Great*. He saw himself as a god, according to the oracle who said he was the son of Zeus. Adding an Abraham Lincoln mask on the back of a mannequin's head turned him into a Janus, the god of dualities, of beginnings and endings, transitions, who looks to the past and the future. Increasingly I'm looking at art from the past: Hellenistic sculpture and paleolithic statues. And I'm thinking about the future when an app tells me Rrose Sélavy means "Pink Delay." If we come up with a title for the interview, I think it should be called "Pink Delay." ▮



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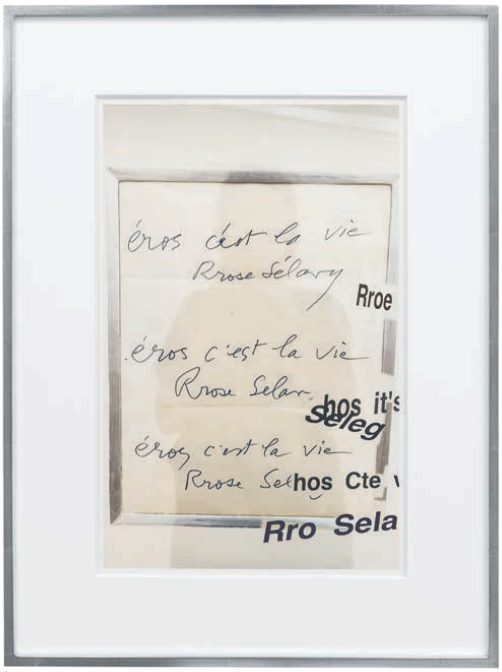

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