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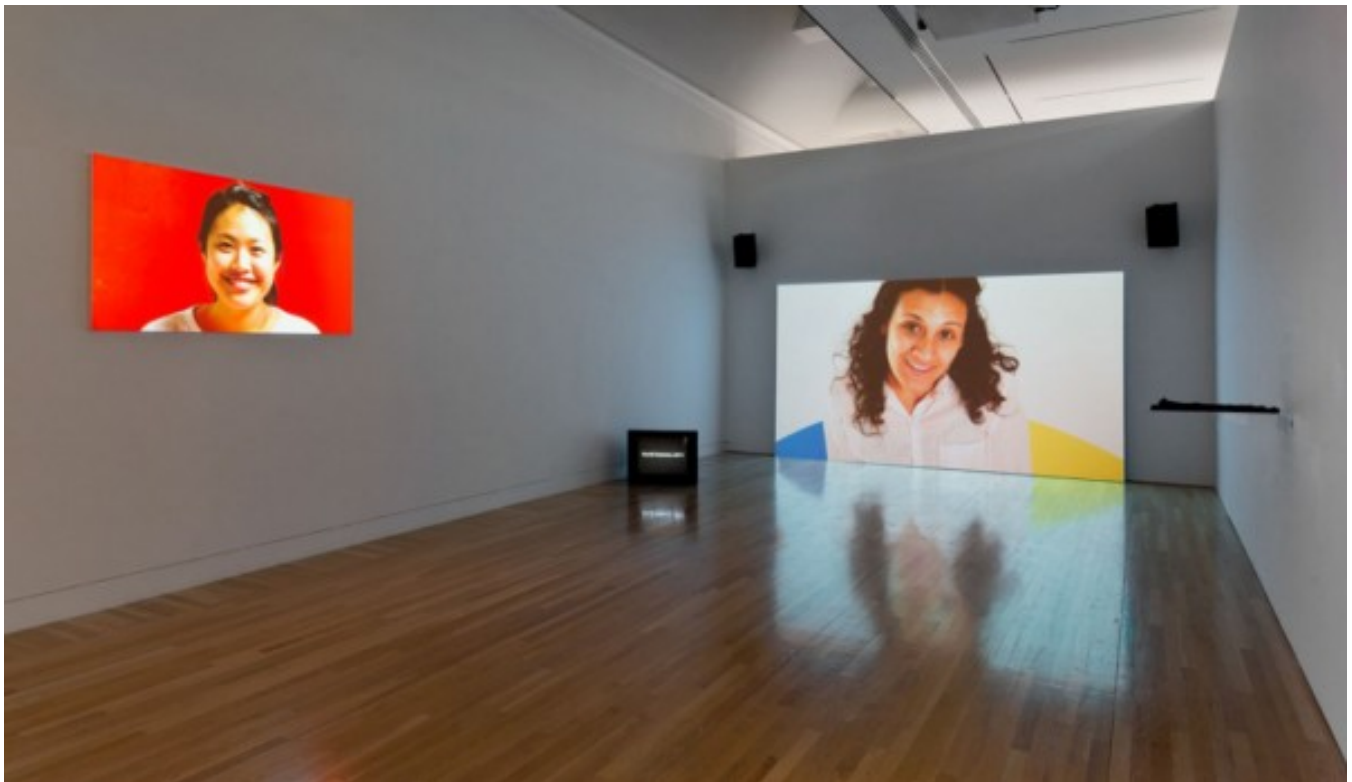
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Odd Jobs

January 2, 2017 Written by [Calder Yates](#)

Odd Jobs: Danielle Dean

Welcome back to *Odd Jobs*, where artists talk about their varied and nontraditional career arcs. For this installment, I spoke to [Danielle Dean](#)—born to a Nigerian father and an English mother in Alabama—whose interdisciplinary practice draws from this multinational background. Her work explores the interpellation of thoughts, feelings, and social relations by power structures working through news, advertising, political speech, and digital media. She has shown her work in solo exhibitions at *Commonwealth and Council* in Los Angeles and *Bindery Projects* in Minnesota, and in group shows at the *Hammer Museum* and the *Guggenheim Gallery* at Chapman University. She has received grants from the *Foundation for Contemporary Arts*, *Rema Hort Foundation*, and *Creative Capital*. This month, Dean has a solo show opening at *Commonwealth & Council*, and will also have work in a group show at the *Sculpture Center* in New York.



Danielle Dean. *Trainers*, 2014; installation view at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Courtesy of the Artist.

Calder Yates: You were born in the U.S. but you grew up in England, is that right?

CY: What else have you done?

DD: Once I called up an escort agency. I didn't do it because I was young, and I didn't really fully get it. I thought maybe I could just do escorting without sexual favors. It was also a massage parlor and the owner was like: "You know we have to do MORE than just massages, I hope you know that." It's always been a bit of a hustle to get money, right? So I was probably thinking, "What could I do?"

CY: But you didn't do it.

DD: No. Basically I moved back to London to take a receptionist job in Soho in an advertising company. I ended up becoming friends with a lot of people on the creative floor. I realized that I could probably do that job really easily. [Eventually] they employed me to be an art director and I did that for a couple of years. I then decided it was the worst career move I could ever make and so I went to CalArts.

CY: The video you had at [The Pit](#) this year depicted a Nike shoe that morphed into different forms. And your video for *Made in LA* used the visual rhetoric of advertising, too.

DD: I find advertising a really intriguing phenomenon. Growing up in the UK and working in an advertising firm, you saw how a commercial context became more and more important. I think that time enabled me to have a more thorough understanding of what that industry does and how it does it.



Danielle Dean. *Hexafluorosilicic*, 2015; installation view at Commonwealth & Council, Los Angeles. Courtesy of the Artist.

CY: Did you keep a studio practice active while you were working in those advertising firms?

DD: Yeah. When I did the [Whitney Museum Independent Study Program] in New York, I worked for Martha Rosler. I got a grant from the Rema Hort Mann Foundation, which wasn't much but I used that to live.

I do a lot of residencies to survive financially. Like during the Core Program in Houston [the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston] I got a stipend. Right now I'm teaching. My partner is a PhD candidate at Columbia [University], so we have a Columbia apartment.

Recently, I worked for a pizza restaurant called Ruby Rosa, and that was awful. How do you say when you stand at the front and—a hostess? Someone who takes you to your table? Oh my god, it was awful. During the Christmas period, they increase your hours. But they never told me they would do that. So suddenly I was working every day and I said, "Look, I can't do that. I'll do my regular shifts." And they were like: "No, this is really important." And I was like, "I'm really sorry, this is NOT really important."



Danielle Dean. *Hexafluorosilicic*, 2015; installation view at Commonwealth & Council, Los Angeles. Courtesy of the Artist.

CY: You're still kind of at the beginning of your career. Do you feel like you're past the point of making ends meet through a whole bunch of odd jobs?

DD: I don't know. I'm hoping that I can make teaching work, because that's really a privilege to do and be paid for it. I'd like to be able to sell more of my work to collections. I'm hoping that things are going to get better. Things have already gotten better; I'm not working at a bar. And I get grants sometimes. But I really don't want to work in a bar again.