

Showing Work

by Emily Lee

I do miss not having to think about place, and thus really wanting to. I miss when I and the people around me agreed to move around in big, emptied rooms all white and hypothetical. Thoughts of real life and money and time only entered those rooms if we wanted it to, if someone wanted to talk about value, or valuing, and the people in history known for doing it well or poorly. In those times, we inflated white cubes with our happily unsellable, difficult, indulgently codependent objects, objects fixated on proving the shape, specificity, and place-hood of the rooms we shared. These rooms make the slow and complicated delivery of sensation or meaning feel delicious.

To the place we sleep now, our house.

I find myself unable to think about place here, insofar as I can only think about place. By place I mean the bent chicken wire fence, the bramble and weeds that blur the image of the yard in my memory. And really, it's not the memory's infidelity, it's the fact that the mess is so ugly to me that I never actually look at it, apparently. Such that when I remember the yard as I write this essay in the passenger seat of my car in a laundromat parking lot, projecting "here-ness" from two miles north of ATS, the image that comes to mind is incomplete.

When it's not a gallery or live music venue, the work that gets made in this place is comparatively contained. I'm comfortable simply making a thing, and I don't currently feel the need to make objects that help you notice the room you're in. I don't feel the need to make installations; for now (and for once) sculptures feel like enough. It's because of this place and time. This warehouse whose floor leaks, whose sheet steel ceiling amplifies the percussive quality of a squirrel's hurling, who is a home to many spider communities the only evidence of which is their own entanglement, is impossible to see all at once.

There will be these little transparent plastic cups, containers for some pastel slurries that Rachael, Michael, and Jesse made ahead of time. We'll paint the baby pink and blue aioli-stuff onto our work, but quickly, like an afterthought. Avocado pits and steel wool, manure and twine to compromise the surface. We'll be hunched next to a wide, kiddie-pool-deep hole that we will have dug there in the back yard of the rental house. It'll feel a little bit like a burial. We'll fill it with clay objects, "objects" being an apt descriptor in its vagueness because it affords the objects some ontological wiggle room; some people will bring plates, and some people will bring sculptures. With a kind of suitcase-logic to the efficiency, two- and three-dimensional shapes, stacked and nested into the hole and into each other, garbage sawdust and scrap paper to pad it all. It'll be covered with logs from the tree that got cut down in the back, and an overbuilt steel grate will hold the lit wood above its fragile clay pile. We'll know to light it and then smother it, watching as we eat baked potatoes cooked over a separate fire (the aiolis are toxic).

Some of us will have met here at the hole, but some of us will have known each other for a long time already. Our collective work will endure some wild atmospheric situation in there, outside our purview but with our guidance. We will wish them well as we eat and drink and wait and worry only a little about them and talk about the next day. Will's documenting on the nice camera.

When we uncover the pit and start cooling the steamy huddle, excavating our own, we'll go through something together, a sharing of specificity and experience. Each of us will carry our objects into the warehouse over the course of the afternoon and set them all next to each other in highly particular ways. We'll see our own work in that moment for the first time and understand it fundamentally in the glow of everyone else's work around it. In this case, nothing is independent—not the work being seen for the first time, not the place, not us, not the exhibit. We have no other option but to make it site-specific (and people-specific and weather-specific and on and on). And when we think back on this exhibit in our memories, conjuring one or a few representative thumbnail images, we won't be able to see it all at once. Much like the bramble and the weeds that blur the edges of every thing in this yard, our lived experience of *work* and of working together will eclipse the shape of the work, of the exhibit reception. The thumbnail will distract us instantly upon remembering it, making us remember instead the tender roots we had to cut to dig deep enough, the

earthworms, the may-pole spinning that tamped down the loose dirt, the coffees, the boots heavy with mess.

The pit is about eight feet wide and two feet deep. For being a deficit, it has a real presence. From a distance, it's a perfect hole in the earth, nameable. Up close, its edges dissolve into the periphery and it just becomes a place again.