

Shim (The Number of Inches Between Them), 2020
Cast brass
22 x 2 5/8 x 1 in.

I remember being taught as a child that there are six simple machines: the wedge, the wheel and axle, the pulley, the screw, the lever, and the inclined plane. The last of these, inclined planes, charge other objects with energy. Inclined planes are a way to work against the downward pull of the Earth, and they both elevate other objects and put them in a position to test gravity by falling. Shims are proletarian inclined planes that aren't allowed to offer this pathway to ascendance or descent. They exist for others—acted upon rather than acting themselves. They hold; they steady; they support; they anchor. Neither is the shim a wedge, used to force apart. Instead, shims keep things together, holding steady those objects that rest on their backs as they hug the floor.

This shim, larger than most, adopts the shape and scale one of the supports for the sculpture and performance *The Number of Inches Between Them*. I saw that performance but didn't see the shim then. It did its unsung job by bracing Gordon's reconstruction of a sculpture by Dennis Croteau. Originally an outdoor bench on uneven ground, the sculpture was remade and relocated inside to a regular floor. The shim held steady the unorthodox cast concrete bench so that performers' bodies could move above, over, and around it. Its invisible labor made it all possible.

Now in cast brass, this outsized shim is freed from its supporting role. Shims expect to be squeezed; and their task is to push downwards and upwards in equal measure. This sculpture, instead, has retired from that labor. No longer caught between pressures from above and below, this tiny unburdened Atlas stands on its own. It has done enough work, and it is recalcitrant in its newfound uselessness. It sometimes dreams that it might have been an inclined plane, even though its low-slung right triangle of a profile offers only a short path to ascent, all that its terminal height allows. But this shim doesn't need to do more than remind you that it could, like any other inclined plane, still stand against gravity's pull. No longer laboring for others, it now simply rests.

—David J. Getsy



CIRCLING THE SQUARE
WORDS FROM END OF DAY

Published on the occasion of
Gordon Hall
END OF DAY

Hesse Flatow
March 26 - April 24, 2021

Circling the Square: Words from END OF DAY
Co-edited and designed by Gordon Hall and Mira Dayal

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Introduction

Gordon Hall

Making art is often a solitary activity, but almost every other aspect of doing it involves relationships with people. The sixteen contributors to *Circling the Square: Words from END OF DAY* come from every corner of the social world of my art practice—artists I’ve collaborated with, curators who have made my shows, artists and historians I have taught with or studied with or learned from. Some are among my oldest friends, while others I just met recently. I want to express my deep appreciation to each of them for taking the time to prepare their words, participate in the live event, and include their text in this publication. I also want to thank Karen Hesse Flatow for bringing this exhibition into being and organizing this book project with me. And my deep appreciation to Mira Dayal who has generously collaborated with me on all aspects of *Circling the Square*.

END OF DAY is a show of sculptures, and people are often curious if this or that particular work has a corresponding performance. As in, “Is *this* for a performance? Is *this* for a performance?” The question makes sense, since my sculptures often are performed on, or with, or around, and I think of them as objects of use, even when that use is only proposed and never realized. In this instance, the answer to that question is no — as far as I know, I won’t be arranging public actions with these works for my or other people’s bodies. This is partly in response to the limitations of COVID, but also because for whatever reason, I don’t feel like this show requests it. But, this decision about performance has never felt like a big one to make, and I’ll confess I am sometimes puzzled because this distinction between performance/no performance somehow feels less significant to me than it seems to feel to others. What does it mean for an object to perform? What is the difference between imagining a body doing something and seeing a body doing something? I think that what I’m really after is the sense that sculptures can *do* things—sometimes be used in performance, sometimes lean against a wall, sometimes speak to each other, sometimes propose a way of seeing, conjure a set of feelings, or uncover a distant memory. Are these all not also uses? Can they be thought of as performances?

When I invited the contributors to *Circling the Square* to participate, I described the invitation to them in the following way: “When I make performances in my work, I make that movement in response to my sculptures. I make the objects first and then I watch them and listen to them, trying to hear what they want to happen with our bodies on and around them. I am thinking of these texts the same way. They are not meant to be primarily about the objects, though analysis can certainly play some role. Rather, they use the work as a point of departure for thinking and speaking. You are writing from, or to, or with, or because of your chosen object. What do these sculptures propose?”

In this way, these texts attempt to answer the objects in the same way I often answer them with moving bodies. Sometimes bodies, this time words. The primary difference for me here is the loosening of authorial control necessitated by this invitation, and the generosity of the writers as they bring my work into their worlds. These texts aren’t what I would say in relation to these works, and I heard many of them for the first time at the live event. They reflect the interests and investments of the writers, and are written in a wide variety of voices and literary styles. What they have in common is that they come from focused attention to these objects, as a way of putting them to use.



Math Bass is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice spans across painting, performance, sculpture, and video. Recent solo exhibitions include Susanne Vielmetter, Los Angeles; Various Small Fires, Seoul; Tanya Leighton, Berlin; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Mary Boone Gallery, New York; The Jewish Museum, New York; Yuz Museum, Shanghai; and MoMA PS1, New York.

Corin Hewitt's installations, performances, sculptures, photographs, and videos investigate relationships within architecture and domestic life. Solo exhibitions of Hewitt's work include Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; MOCA Cleveland; ICA VCU, Richmond; the Atlanta Contemporary Arts Center, and the Seattle Museum of Art, among others venues.

John Neff is a photographer and teacher. He lives in Chicago and New York. Past exhibition venues include Artists Space, New York; The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; The Philadelphia Museum of Art; Regards, Chicago; The Renaissance Society, Chicago; and Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.

Rami George is an interdisciplinary artist currently living and working in Philadelphia. They have exhibited and screened internationally, and continue to be motivated by political struggles and fractured narratives.

Kahlil Robert Irving is a sculptor and educator living and working in Saint Louis, Missouri. Irving is currently readjusting to life in the Midwest and is taking on new responsibilities that will ultimately impact the emphasis of the haptic in his work.

Mira Dayal is an artist, critic, and editor based in New York. Her studio work often involves laborious, critical uses of language, material, and site, and has been shown at venues including Kunstverein Dresden; Spencer Brownstone Gallery, New York; Gymnasium, Brooklyn; Lubov, New York; NURTUREart, Brooklyn; NARS Foundation, Brooklyn; and Abrons Art Center, New York.

Nicole Eisenman lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She is a MacArthur Foundation Fellow and was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2018. Her work was included in both the 2019 Venice Biennale and the 2019 Whitney Biennial.

Roya Amirsoleymani is an arts administrator, educator, and Artistic Director & Curator of Public Engagement at Portland Institute for Contemporary Art in Portland, Oregon.

X Zhu-Nowell is a curator, writer, and occasionally an artist. They are currently serving as Assistant Curator at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, where they arrange exhibitions, make acquisitions, organize performances, write essays, and lead various curatorial working groups.

Danny Giles is an artist based in Rotterdam, working in drawing, performance and sculpture. His work has been exhibited, performed and screened at venues including Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; and Museo Tamayo, Mexico City.

Jason Hendrik Hansma is an artist based in Rotterdam. His work explores language (and the loss of language) as having a key role in the politics of aesthetics. Exhibitions, performances, readings, and screenings have been presented at UNESCO Paris; Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen; Contemporary Art Centre Vilnius; and the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, among other venues.

David J. Getsy is an art historian who writes about the ways that sculpture and performance can figure relations. His newest book, *Queer Behavior: Scott Burton and Performance*, is forthcoming from University of Chicago Press in 2022.

Nancy Lupo is an artist currently based in Tbilisi, Georgia who makes sculptures, drawings, videos and writing. Recent solo exhibitions include The Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego; Kristina Kite Gallery, Los Angeles; and Dawid Radziszewski, Warsaw. Her first public artwork was presented in the fall of 2019 in Pershing Square in downtown Los Angeles.

sidony o'neal is an artist and writer based in Portland, Oregon. Their work has been presented at Sculpture Center, New York; Fourteen30 Contemporary, Portland; and Institute for New Connotative Action, Portland. Performances as a part of non-band DEAD THOROUGHbred have been presented at Portland Institute for Contemporary Art and Kunstverein Düsseldorf.

Katherine Lennard is a cultural historian specializing in the history of dress. She is currently the Abbott Lowell Cummings Fellow in American Material Culture at Boston University.

Andrew Kachel is a New York-based curator and writer, and the Director & Felix Gonzalez-Torres Liaison at Andrea Rosen Gallery. He has recently collaborated on curatorial projects at PARTICIPANT INC, New York, and worked as a core organizer of Galleries Commit, a worker-led collective committed to a climate-conscious, resilient, and equitable future for New York City galleries.