

Slow Bonds and the Intimacy of Objects

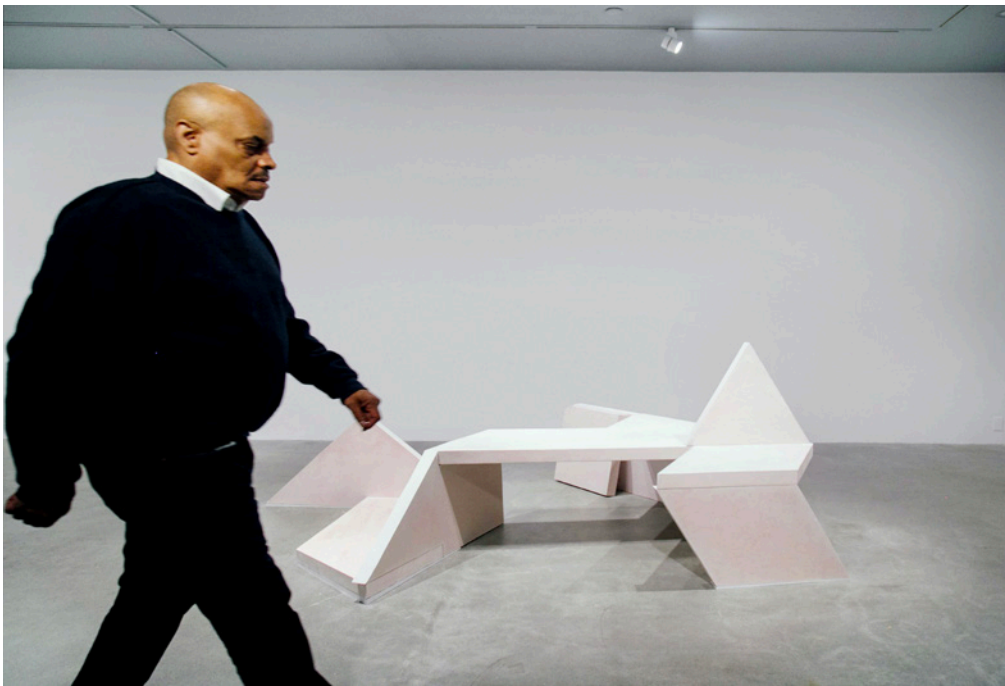
A Conversation Between Gordon Hall and David J. Getsy

Yuri Stone: I think a good way to start this conversation would be to ask Gordon to walk us through the different elements of the exhibition that is on view in the Bakalar Gallery.

Gordon Hall: *The Number of Inches Between Them* has four main components: two sculptures, a stack of posters, and the performance. As you may have gathered, the sculptures are two different forms of the same object. One of them is assembled into a finished bench, and the other one is comprised of the eight panels that make up the bench, separated, and leaning against the wall on the left side of the gallery. The posters that you see stacked on the shelf on the right side of the gallery show a photograph of the original bench that my sculptural replicas are based off of. They are exact to-scale copies of that bench you see in the image. On the other side of the poster is a letter, an undeliverable letter from me, to Dennis Croteau, the artist who made the bench, who passed away in 1989. The fourth component of the exhibition is the performance that you saw today, with five performers including myself.

David Getsy: As I've just seen the performance for the first time, this is not a full-fledged analysis, but I'm going to just go ahead and lead with an initial idea and then I'll unpack it. What compelled me most about the performance is how you offer—and this is going to sound grand—what we might call a “poetics of the interpersonal.” By that I mean that, throughout the performance, we slowly and carefully get to know this unique sculptural object in a way that mirrors your own process of research. In getting to know something in all its uniqueness through the actions of the performers, one learns to ask what are the relations it can offer us? What are the resistances it can offer us? Where does it accommodate us? All of this seems to be a way of thinking about not just a set of physical relations but also as a modeling of an ethics and a poetics of the interpersonal. That is my initial response to it, but I'd love to talk about the history of your encounter with Dennis Croteau's work. There was a lot of melancholy associated with the performance for me as well, because of that history. How did you get to know Croteau and the object?

GH: This piece started out as a continuation of my series of works that are replicas of found pieces of furniture. This series of replica sculptures is governed by rules: I have to encounter the object by accident, I can't go shopping or looking for it, it has to be hand-made and one of a kind, and I have to be unable to figure out who



made it. This project started out this way. My friend had a photo of the bench, and I asked her to bring me to see it in person in the yard of her grandparents' home in Clinton, New Jersey. Her grandfather explained that the bench was a sculpture which he had bought from the Boston-based dealer Joan Sonnabend in the 80s, but he couldn't recall the name of the person who made it. Over the next few months, with the help of various members of the family I learned that the bench was a sculpture made by a largely unknown artist named Dennis Croteau who worked during the 70s and 80s. I got into researching him and learning everything I could about him, speaking with some of his friends. I learned a lot but there were other things I couldn't find out, like what the bench is called and when exactly he made it, and how. I found out that Dennis passed away from complications related to AIDS in '89.

DG: Your earlier replica series—just for the audience who might not know—are much simpler objects.

GH: And smaller.

DG: And smaller. They share certain traits but not at this scale. It's interesting to hear how your research process necessarily had to expand in order to try and fill in what you could about the person who made the bench. But again, I feel like that process is also built into the structure of the performance, with its actions repeated again and again. You walk us through as viewers, helping us to get to know this bench. For example, there's the moment when you're saying "1:00, 2:00, 3:00..." giving us the position on the edge as one would with a clock. I started thinking "OK, the positions should all be equally spaced," and then I began to see that your body was placed in different positions and spacings necessitated by the bench's angles. It's a way of teaching us to get to know this thing. If I asked those of us in the audience to describe the bench now, as opposed to at the beginning of the performance, we could do it a lot better because we've been staring at it and watching the ways that bodies relate to those angles. I love the slowness of that *getting to know*. It's mysterious, opaque, odd, particular, all of those things, but it's also... We have an intimacy that has been established through the performance. But I want to step back from the performance to talk about how this works when the performance is not happening—for viewers looking at the sculpture who have not seen the performance. I think this dynamic is still there. Could you talk a little bit more about how you see the installation when it's not being activated?



GH: I primarily make sculptures, and about half of them have performances that originate in them and happen with them/on them/around them. I feel stubborn about not putting documentation of performances in the exhibition with the sculptures. I have a variety of reasons for this, but part of that is what you are pointing to, which is that I set out to make the objects themselves do much of the work of the exhibition. The performances can elaborate, deepen, refocus; but my hope is that a lot of it is already there in the sculptures. Perhaps if I go to the beginning and ask myself, “what is behind this desire to replicate a piece of furniture?” The answer is that, for me, making a copy of something is the best way to get to know it. Because you have to get close enough to it to understand how it fits together. For me there’s no other way. I think the closest parallel would be, for people who draw, drawing a portrait of something or someone. You actually look at the thing, possibly for the first time (although I don’t draw so I don’t know a lot about this). And so in this exhibition I have tried to reproduce that process, in having the two different versions of it where you can see how it comes apart and fits together. When you look at the assembled version you can put together, sort of, which pieces are which and so you start flipping them around in your mind, right? Upside down, and horizontally, and vertically. I’m trying to push the viewer to do some perceptual work that involves becoming more acquainted with, intimate with, knowledgeable about this object in a way that mirrors and condenses how I did.

DG: What I love about your work is that it so quietly distills this process down for viewers, but it also demands time. For example, there are those odd shapes that are all along the wall—unorthodox shapes that we are not used to seeing. They appear arbitrary if it were not for the meaning that has been given to them by Croteau and you. And so, we slowly unpack their particularities and their relations, and they start to increase in recognition and particularity as we see that one is a support, the other is supported, here is where they lock, and so on. All of that is kept on a formal level but it’s a way to distill the slow way we actually get to know something—and how the thing gains meaning through its repetition. But, all of this greater knowledge of the sculpture comes also through the use, its parts, its repetitions, and everything working together. This does take some time. It’s not a quick exhibition to go through, right? I had to start to compare and contrast and look deeply in order to situate myself—both alone in the installation and also when I was viewing the performance. The things that I thought were merely



odd at first and confusing or perhaps a little mute began to speak, slowly. I started seeing how they relate to each other and everything else in the room. Even when just considering the installation alone, we must go through a process of finding particularity through recognizing repetition and its variations. That back and forth between different ways of trying to understand the same object is crucial not just to the performance but also to the installation—especially with the gesture to a space and time outside of the gallery through the back and forth between the image on the poster and your sculpture. We start to compare and contrast, seeing a glimpse of the life of this form in other places.

GH: Can I interject something?

DG: Sure!

GH: I was just reflecting on this in relation to the performance that just took place. This work, in particular, is probably the most pared back thing I've made. There are just a few elements in the show, the formal language is quite reduced, the performance moves along slowly, and there is a lot of repetition in the objects and the movement. I'm not sure how it comes across to the viewer, but for me it's an ongoing battle to try to resist my temptation to give more to look at, to make it more entertaining. I'm not interested in boredom, exactly, but I am interested in providing a pace which feels really different from the pace of the surrounding world, especially right now. So much stuff is constantly happening, a million things at once, visually and in every other sense. For me making work and seeing work has become a way of retraining my own perception so that I can move more slowly, or look more closely at things. This show, I think it does ask a lot of the viewer; the silence of the performance, the repetition, and concrete sculptures. Perhaps to the viewer this reduction could seem like a forgone conclusion, but for me it's a constant process of remaining committed to it, despite often feeling some type of pressure to give more.

DG: That reticence, that slowness that you impose on the viewing situation is part of the politics of the work. It demands from the viewer commitment, to get to know, to understand what one can understand from looking and thinking and spending time. For me that's one of the lessons of your work more broadly—to think about how a commitment to viewing the work is rewarded by the objects that at first seem opaque or that have their back turned to you. This is

what I was talking about when I used this grand phrase “the poetics of the interpersonal.” It’s like friendship or love—the longer one spends getting to know the object of that love, attention transforms towards intimacy. And this getting-to-know takes time, and I feel like that’s the deliberate slowness you produce in the work. You refuse to be simply pedagogical with the work or to fully illustrate your research practice. Many other artists use an array of tactics to quickly reveal everything so that it can catch fleeting and distracted attention and be immediately categorized (and consumed). Your work, however, seems to me to be quite intentionally moving away from that. You are creating this ethical situation with formal objects as a way of teaching us how the ways we look at unfamiliar art objects can model the ways we relate as persons to each other. Maybe we can talk about the title of the work?

GH: The title comes from a quote from the artist Scott Burton. Would you be so kind as to give a short summary of who Scott Burton was for people who are not familiar with his work?

DG: Gladly. Scott Burton could be described as polyglot in the art world. He started as an art critic and wrote some very important art criticism, and then for 10 years was a performance artist who, in this time, also started to make sculptures of furniture that functioned as furniture. In the late 70’s and early 80’s he pivoted to public art, motivated by his belief in trying to make an anti-elitist, open, and accessible form of artistic practice. The atrium of the Wiesner Center has at its center the benches and the balustrade that Scott Burton designed for it. It’s a sculpture that we’ve all been sitting on and walking through. The works are intentionally

camouflaged, invisible, hard to see, but they are based on Burton’s own long-running investigation into behavioral psychology, the cybernetic study of body language, the dynamics of how to use space in different ways. All of this, again, is a kind of slow research practice that ends up in these fairly simple, reductive, geometric forms that are meant to provide spaces for you to relate, to linger, to engage. He’s another artist whose move into functional sculpture came from a real investigation of performance practices, but also the everyday performances that we do when we relate to each other nonverbally. The other thing that’s important about Burton’s work is that he was a critic of minimalism and also one of the primary post-minimal artists. He was working along the same lines as the female postminimalists who explored the formal reduction of minimalism not as a way to create universals but, rather, to make space for difference. Minimalism’s idea is that you take something and reduce it to its simplest forms intentionally in order to bore you into paying attention to the way you’re relating to the space and the object. So that’s the cliché of what a minimalist cube is supposed to do. But artists such as Scott Burton, Eva Hesse, Lynda Benglis, Jackie Winsor are part of an alternate history of trying to take that shift from the artist to the viewer and introduce into it the possibility of the personal, of difference, and even of resistance. But the story of this work has been downplayed or sidelined in the kind of heroic art histories of minimalism into post-minimalism into contemporary art. In Burton’s case, part of that is because of the AIDS crisis. That connects up with the themes of your work for the List. More generally, this alternate history of one tendency within postminimalism reminds us of the ways in which the idea of formal reduction had all of this potential that was explored by



artists who were interested in questions of difference. With the distance of history those politics are harder to see immediately, however, I know.

GH: I'll just indulge a little bit and say Burton's work, there's a sexuality to it. There are various coded, sexual ways of relating via objects and interpersonal relationships. You introduced me to Burton's work and your research on him has been so valuable for me in understanding these layers. For me, as an art student during the late 90s through the 2000s, the version of minimal and post minimal work that included Scott Burton was largely written out of what we were taught. I got the impression that as young artists, if we were interested in identity we should be interested in *those* kinds of artists, and if we're interested in formalism we'd be interested in *these* kinds of artists. And of course all of this is based on the presumption that the political and the formal are clearly identifiable and discrete categories. Ultimately for me this version of art history didn't compute. Scott Burton has been very important for me, not just because I'm really excited about the work itself, but also because I am interested in why certain artists are remembered and historicized and other ones not. How are these stories told? Who got to be the authority on this particular canon? Why then as a young queer student of art did I feel like the work I was interested in was not the work I was supposed to be interested in? That's why I was excited to learn about this alternate history and Burton's way of making. At any rate, the title—I had to go all the way around... Burton had a series of three performance works in the 70s called the *Behavior Tableaux* performances. In these performances, groups or individual performers were moving in slow

motion and silence, sometimes naked, sometimes clothed, often wearing platform shoes, in relation to furniture. And then the audience was made to sit 80 feet away from the performance, so not only was this thing extremely silent and slow and long, it was really far, quite far away. And all the chairs, a little bit like today, all the chairs are put *ttt, ttt, ttt, ttt, ttt* [gestures to describe close proximity of chairs] so you're basically touching the person next to you in the audience. So there is all of this potentially awkward, or maybe not, you know, whatever that is, accidental touching. And in an interview Burton was asked what his intention was in organizing the audience for these performances in this way. His answer was that "in the *Behavior Tableaux* what I want people to become aware of is the emotional nature of the number of inches between them." He was talking about *these* inches. [Gestures at shoulder] So for me that little phrase, "the number of inches between them," popped off the page as a way of talking about the both physical and symbolic space between people, but also in the work itself; all of the measurements of bench, the way the pieces of it fit together, the way it relates to the other objects that are lined up against the wall, and the distance between them as well. And so it just turned into a way of talking about this question of distance between various things, both literally and in a more expanded sense. Further, the fact the Scott Burton and Dennis Croteau both died from AIDS in the same year, 1989, helped me feel that there was some connection between them, perhaps a mysterious, or eerie, one. I did learn that Burton and Croteau were acquaintances, but I haven't been able to find out more. I had already been thinking of, I mean I've been working with furniture, different kinds of platforms, and things that hold up people's bodies, but this bench had taken on extra significance



for me in terms of thinking about bodily vulnerability, the kinds of dependencies we have on each other, what support means, both physical support and symbolic or metaphorical, or infrastructural or emotional support. And so the AIDS crisis announced itself as part of this project in a way that resonated with what I was already thinking about while beginning to make it.

DG: The *Behavior Tableaux* performances were based on Burton's interest in behavioral psychology and body language but also in his experience of street cruising and of silent signals of desire. Cruising signals are conveyed by people who are also looking for them from others underneath the veil of normal movements and gestures on the street. Burton was trying to produce an analogy between the performers' movements and the either awkward or exciting relations that are established amongst the audience members at the same time. So, these dynamics go back and forth. I think one of the things that's useful about Burton as a kind of analogy is that he also drew from an experience of sexuality and queer culture to make work that sometimes figured these themes. But he also was trying to think about how this relationship to the normative—to the rules that we're told about how we're supposed to be—actually allowed one to think about a larger politics or ethics of relations among people. It starts with questions of sexuality and moves to questions of sociality, and that dynamic is played out in part because the private—the so-called private realm of sexuality—is always highly legislated. He realized that just by thinking about the power dynamics of that situation he could think more expansively. One of the things, just to pivot back to your performance, that I find so interesting is, for me, the context of Dennis Croteau dying in 1989 of AIDS

seemed to me to have kicked the performance into a certain set of emotional questions, at least for a viewer like me, in which the life of the bench was being thematized by the different relations that happen through the performances. With the first performer, we are looking at someone basically looking at us, but they are also feeling their inside, thinking about their own body. Suddenly we move to the kind of rapid succession of the other two performers who are seated with their backs toward us. It would be so easy to stop with that and have us have the same kind of identification, to look over the shoulders of those performers and think "oh this is that pastoral moment" where someone is looking into the distance. But you didn't give us that. No, it was just the repetition of these movements, and I suddenly thought, in the middle of this, that this was a way of thinking about all of the different relations in this bench's life. The movement around and the repetition started to get a different rhythm to it, and then when the time signatures are put in: "1:00, 2:00..." the passage of time, and the bodies came back in relation to the bench, and the ones who left. All of that playing out in my experience of the performance. When we think about the erotics of this work, it's not a simple figuration of the erotic, but rather the build-up through a body over its many different stages in relationship to the other bodies that come in contact with it. And so, it has this beautiful way of containing these moments that spoke to intimacy and eroticism, but always using that to push toward this larger question of getting to know this object's particularities. It also staged the ways in which this bench produced its intimacies and relations through its odd angles and forms. Relatedly, and you didn't know this since this is a really obscure Scott Burton thing I'm going to tell you: the Wiesner Center benches were Burton's attempt to



be pedagogical. When you go outside you'll see this lower curved bench and behind it is this settee with a back and behind that is the balustrade which blocks off the stairs, the railing. It was his way of showing how one form and function could become another. There is a side story of the building codes he had to navigate so there are some things that don't look exactly as he wanted to... but the idea was that that bench and that settee are both the same form and different. It's illustrating a transformation, and he said this is like a dialectic—it's one plus two equals this third term that has both of those things in it. So that's what's going on outside in the atrium. But it's the same kind of syntax that you offer with the work in the gallery in which these forms gain their meaning through their relations and repetitions with each other and then begin to transform with their uses. I love that by having this formal reduction and structural unpacking of this object, you prompt us to get to know these forms by showing us what they do in relation to each other. There are all of these connections on the themes of transformation and use that connect with the Burton works that are right outside of the door. So I love that. Sorry to geek out on this.

GH: I'm just realizing, reflecting on what just happened and hearing you talk about it, that perhaps there are two main affects in the performance. I'm not sure I set out for them to be there, but I see them now. One of them is grief and grieving. And I guess I separate them that way because thinking of the performance—the moment when they're doing this round of sitting and one of the performers finishes before the other one, there's perhaps a lot of grief in that—leaving and having to finish something by yourself. But then also I have thought about the performance, but also the exhibition



overall, as a space of grieving provided for the viewers, whatever grieving there is to do, as a quiet space. The way this gallery doesn't have any windows and is always exactly the same, and the wooden bench by the door that we made for the exhibition so there is a place for the viewers to sit and look and read the letter, and it is the same height as the concrete bench. So both grief and grieving. Then there is an erotics, or a sexuality, playing out between the performers, the way we move together and watch each other move, and in the way the audience is asked to watch our bodies. But also, and perhaps more importantly to me, there is an erotics of relating to an inanimate object. I was thinking about all of the intimacies one has with furniture in one's life, and especially in illness or as we age, this intimacy gets amplified as we become more and more reliant on the objects of our lives in order to be sustained. So in this work there is grief and there is sexuality, and I am thinking of them as very intertwined in this work. Perhaps the pin that holds them together is something about objectification. When does a body go from being a subject to being an object? What are the different ways that bodies can be objects in some very damaging ways and some very reparative or pleasurable ways? What is it to be looked at by other people, to have your body looked at? How is it different for different people to have our bodies looked at?

DG: These strands do come together, because when you think about a life... it's all about the series of intimacies and relations that make it up. This is a way of thinking about something like love: it's always painful because it will always end. Because two people together cannot always be together. And the two—erotics and grief—are closely related, and I think that gets played out in these moments in your



performance when the performers get out of synch with each other. The movement of the performance enacts moments of support, intimacy, and also being past and getting out of synch. This happens with the performers both physically with the object and interpersonally with each other. This leads me to a question: would you talk a little bit about your decision to cast your performers as older people?

GH: Yes. There are a number of reasons—the main one being that I wanted to have the bodies in the performance be bodies that are already in a relation of reliance on various kinds of support and assistance. There is a vulnerability to aging that feels like a crucial ingredient here. But also, personally, it has been a way to just get to know, even a little bit, people who are in different parts of their life than I am. It has really been special. And it has helped me think about what is to come, what happens in a long life, and about parts of life many people didn't and don't get to experience. So it's about the performance but then it's also about the relationships that go into making it.

DG: One of the impacts of the AIDS crisis, for everybody, is that it made certain kinds of intergenerational contact and friendships very difficult. When a huge segment of the population is suddenly removed from it, that affects everybody individually and the culture more broadly. There's a lot of work that is being done to reestablish these kinds of intergenerational friendships. And it does take work but that's also part of the research that went into your piece, too. After all, this bench is such an opaque object because of the AIDS crisis. People and memories have been lost. And that's part of our duty to repair those gaps. But I hope that we can end it on a happier note with some audience questions,

especially since the performers have joined us in the audience. Does anyone have any questions for Gordon?

Audience: Earlier you said something about three categories in the replica sculptures. Why those three things?

GH: I think the first time it happened, it happened by accident. And then I noticed that there were guidelines actually built into what I did, so thought I'd try to do it again. More generally speaking, perhaps if I make the criteria for my decision making very narrow I can be creative within them.

Audience: But why not polka dots? Why those three things? You know what I mean, why those three things exactly?

GH: Why furniture? Why handmade? And why anonymous?

DG: I can see from your pause you've got too many answers to each of these questions. If you'll allow me, I can offer an answer based on my external perspective on your work and our previous conversations.

GH: Go ahead.

DG: Well, furniture because... furniture is a really powerful form; it's anthropomorphic. It's made to be in relationship to our bodies. Chairs have arms, legs, back, feet—all of these things. And so furniture is always a way to conjure a body, and it is empty without us. Furniture always evokes the bodily relation. So, it seems to me that for an artist who's thinking about questions of the interpersonal, and



the social, and the bodily—and how we think about the particularity of bodies—furniture does seem like a natural choice. The particular or odd object is also about these same kinds of thematics. When you encounter something that seems to be like nothing else in the world, the only way you can understand it is by taking bits of other things and saying “this looks kind of like that, this looks kind of like that,” and trying to make sense of it. But the more time you spend with something the more you force yourself to get to know it for itself, rather than for the category that it’s in.

GH: Yes! Getting to know a specific object instead of a category of objects. Perhaps the recreating of these objects is a way of caring about them... the world’s filled with objects we don’t pay attention to and this is a way of providing some care for them.

DG: And the handmade... I think just like because of the intimacy in that—being able to see something as an intentional object, one where you can see the ways the person who made it put it together... to accommodate for the messiness of the material, which gives it its own history.

GH: Hearing you say that makes me realize that maybe the answer is that all three of these things are ways that bodies are present even when they are not present. Every piece of furniture conjures a ghost, the presence of a body that uses it.

Audience: Earlier you were talking about the way in which minimal form, at a moment in high modernism, was essentially kind of didactic. The way in which it was really set on asking the viewer

to consider themselves in relation to this very minimal thing. And then as you’ve been talking that seems to be returning, in my mind, especially in relationship to the didactic nature of asking us to remember specific people during a specific time, making specific objects for specific purposes. It feels as much like you’re teaching yourself these things as you are eventually maybe teaching an audience? And those are definitely not the same thing. Like I see auto-didacticism as sort of an auto-erotics in you putting this show together. I’m wondering if you can speak to the difference in those two things. In the difference between the experience of teaching yourself maybe as a person from a particular generation and the experience of, maybe, imagining an audience and imagining maybe that you have something that you can teach them.

GH: That’s a really good question. It makes me want to start by saying that, perhaps, I think of being an artist as a way of learning things. Including learning how to do things with my body that I didn’t know. Like how to make stuff out of concrete. But also in the processes of self-transformation that are part of realizing each project. I have an uneasy feeling about trying to teach viewers. Why do I have this feeling? I think I’m more interested in providing a space that has some possibilities in it. Some of which are more logical and open up easily and others of which are harder to find. That feels like all I can do.

Audience: I was struck by the many systems that announce themselves as ready-made invitations to intuit the entire system. Like the clock starts and we know where it’s going. You do one pass through your choreography, and when it comes back we know what’s going to



happen. The shapes are like tangrams that we can fit together in our minds and reorganize them. So it does feel like an invitation to teach ourselves, not just an invitation to be told what to pay attention to.

DG: I agree, that's very much part of it. Because then the second time you do that series of movements without saying "1:00, 2:00, 3:00" we've learned what it means, which is the same way that we learn what those odd polyhedrons start to mean the longer we look at them. Maybe the word that is kind of hanging us up on this is the idea of the didactic. I always think that for me, the best recent art models a relationship with the world. The viewer engages with that modeling, and can choose to take it on themselves and to learn from it or to reject it, but it's different from teaching it, in a one-directional didactic way. It's actually about how Gordon's performance itself goes through this process of getting to know the Croteau object as a way of modeling for us what that might look like with something or someone else.

Audience: I want to agree with that. As a gallery attendant in the gallery talking about this process with some people who come in who have a variety of interactions with the work. Once they learn the story of the work, and see and feel the appreciation and fascination that you have with the original sculpture enough to make two whole sets of sculptures of it. Often I try to point out the pieces outside in the atrium that are also sculptures that they may have walked by or sat on, and didn't realize were sculptures. I have the hope that they are able to mirror that process with whatever objects, furniture, they have in their lives. Especially knowing that the piece is found in an authentic way and whatever they happen upon they might mirror that process.



YS: I want to bring up something that didn't come up in the conversation that I really love. David you mention this idea of friendship and this sort of interconnectedness and I thought, Gordon, maybe you could talk about how this piece is sort of unique for you in terms of the other objects that you've made, and not only the weight of this work, physically, but also sort of the means in which its erected.

GH: There's a bunch of things that make this unique. Primarily, this is the first work that I've ever made that explores the work of a particular other artist, and that's because of how it happened, and it might never happen again. So there is an interpersonal part to this that is different from other works of mine. And then, these sculptures are obviously very heavy and hard to move around. I kept chuckling because I always had this kind of assumption that "making heavy sculpture is really macho," but also it is really vulnerable, because I can't do things by myself. I'll be in my studio, and I can't lift any of the panels except for the little triangular one. Once they go into the molds and cure into a solid, I can't do anything with them by myself. I have to get someone to come and help me get it out of the mold, and help me flip it over, help to wrap it, help to put it in the truck, and then to put the bench together takes seven people. Some of these people in this room now have been through this with me. The seat has to go down onto the legs, and it weighs 320 pounds, and everything has to be in the exact right location for the notches to line up to hold it together. For me I really found this whole experience to be one of vulnerability, of finding myself in a position that felt powerless in relationship to the weight of this work and having to ask for so much help from people. I found this vulnerability to be



really difficult. I'm the kind of person who likes to do things by myself and not feel reliant on others. But the process of making this work ended up teaching me some of the stuff that the work was about, weirdly. Because I found myself in the position of needing support and needing help even to just do basic stuff like putting one part of it into my car. It was very moving for me, when the rage and powerlessness I felt gave way to feeling like I was embodying the logic of the work in my own emotions as I went through making it and showing it. It taught me about bodily vulnerability and the necessity of relying on the care of others.

YS: I suppose I ask for you to bring it up because as the curator, maybe a little behind the curtain; we had seven preparators to help construct this bench and one of our preparators didn't make it that day, called out, so I stepped in to help. For months prior I had been thinking about, and writing about, and talking to Gordon about these systems of support, and ideas about vulnerability, and all of these ideas felt somewhat abstract, or distant, but it wasn't until I was holding the top of the thing, shoulder to shoulder with John the other preparator, and there's Ariana, and our registrar and other members of staff holding different pieces all together...

GH: ...and everyone started bickering!

YS: We were sort of running around and checking because it also had to be level. I had to laugh because I'm standing there holding this incredibly heavy concrete slab and it felt like such a natural execution of these ideas that we had been talking about for so long.

GH: It's making me realize that it's such an embodiment of the role of the curator. In doing this show together you have been in the role of holding my work but also my thoughts and feelings and the life that I put into making it. And that holding became literal. And very heavy!

YS: What I love about this exhibition is that there are so many layers that slowly reveal themselves—I continued to discover new aspects—as they slowly revealed themselves over the course of the work being on view and now the performance has added yet more to consider.



Gordon Hall

The Number of Inches Between Them



Published on the occasion of:

The Number of Inches Between Them
2017

Pigmented cast concrete, one-sided
color poster multiple, performance
42 min.

Performers: Mary Bok, Gordon
Hall, Alan Crichton, Del Hickey,
Susan Schor, Millie Kapp,
and Chris Domenick

Steel House Projects/
Winter Street Warehouse,
Rockland, Maine
August 4–26,
performance August 11, 2017

The Number of Inches Between Them
2017–2018

Pigmented cast concrete, two-sided
color poster multiple, performance
39 min.

Performers: Mary Bok, Gordon Hall,
Mike Peterson, Danny Harris,
and Lou Desautels

MIT List Visual Arts Center,
Cambridge, Massachusetts
April 17–May 20,
performance April 28, 2018

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