

Out of Order

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Out of Order

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Declaration:

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:

Date:

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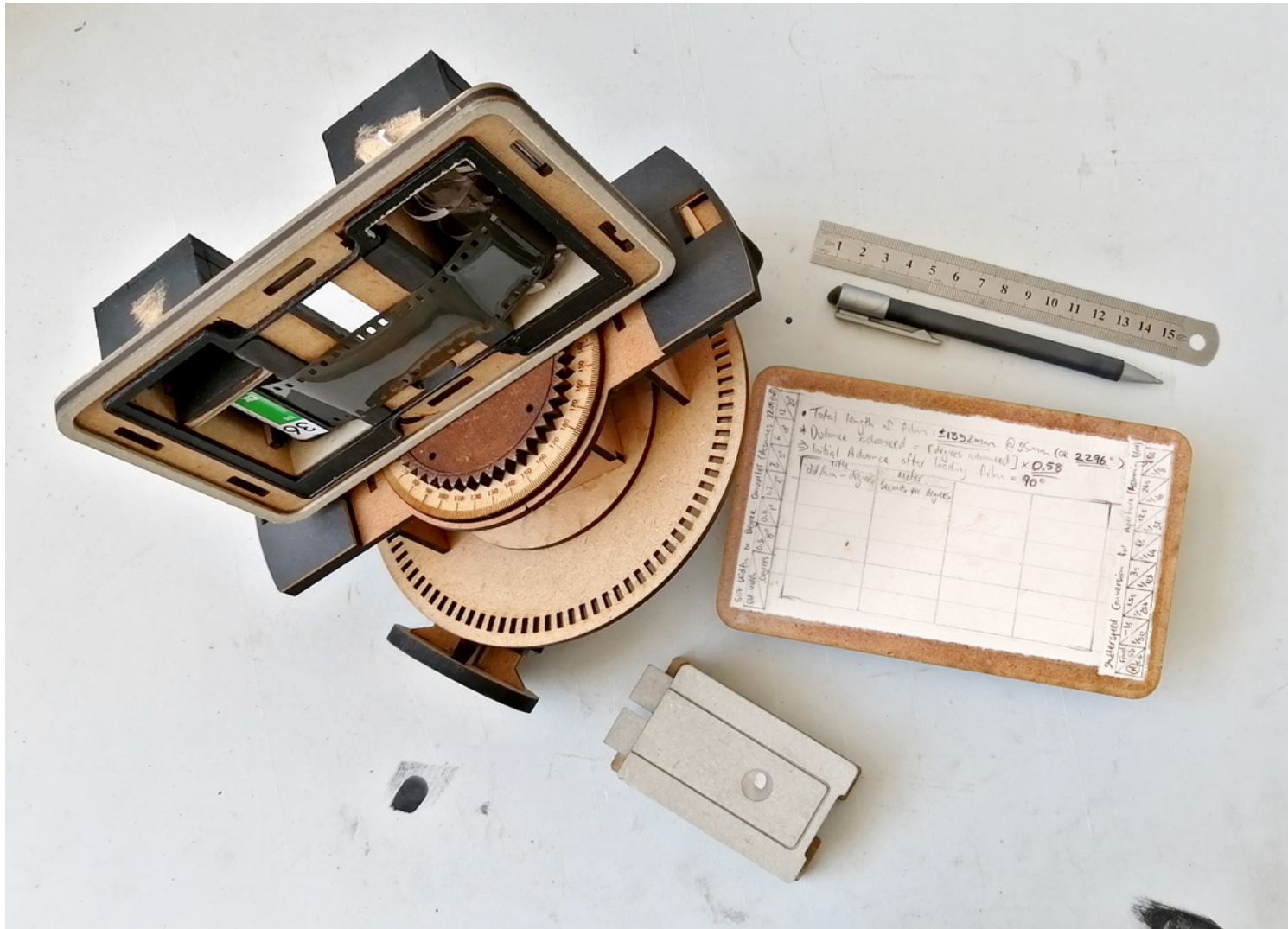
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Abstract

This research project considers the tensions between deliberate acts and unexpected encounters that emerge in the activity of making art. The dissertation presents a discussion on the role that the activity of engaging with materials plays in the shifting conceptions of artistic process in the work of Robert Morris and his contemporaries throughout 1960s art historical discourse. During this time, Morris explored rigidly-defined approaches to art production associated with Minimal art, as well as more uncontrolled, materially curious tendencies associated with works of Process art. Specific focus is given to his interest in the tensions that arise between pre-determined and indeterminate aspects of making art, and how engaging with these tensions can be a means of exploring the nuanced relationship between human systems of order and a material world outside of our control. The artworks and theories of Morris and his contemporaries provide a foundation for a discussion on my own work, addressing specific themes of overlap and divergence between his practice, my own, and those of other contemporary artists.

My methodology involved conceptualising a material object with a pre-determined purpose and extensive, multifaceted production requirements that would offer a rigid framework for ongoing creative activity. Throughout the object's physical production I remained receptive to unexpected and unintended encounters with the tools, materials and environment I was working with, reading them as manifestations of the indeterminate conditions of art making. The insights derived from this process were used as starting points for further avenues of creative inquiry, while generating the artworks that embody the dynamic relationship between my predilection to impose order on the aesthetic encounter against the tendencies of objects and materials to undermine those efforts. In this way, the artworks presented for exhibition are the result of a recursive process. Their forms, materials and arrangements reflect the tensions that I experienced while translating idea to material form, while offering the viewer an indeterminate web of experiences for their own consideration.

This project considers how an art practice that is receptive and responsive to unintended and unexpected encounters with the matter of the world might be a means of exploring the nuanced relationship between human systems of order and a material world outside of our control.



Arc, 2021.
 Prototype camera. Disassembled.
 MDF, Triplex, Malgray, Perspex, Aluminium, Tape, Foam, Paper.

Introduction

At an early stage of this research project I completed *Arc*, a prototype photographic camera of my own design. It is a panoramic pinhole film camera made of wood, cardboard and plastic. The images it produces are highly fragmented, obscuring its subject matter and compromising its legibility. In contrast to the images, I intended the camera itself to be a functional tool that embodied my propensity for being deliberate and procedural in how I interact with the world around me. Its design was developed through many iterations using digital design software and cut with computer-controlled fabrication

machines. It has a modular design with interchangeable parts that allows me to easily change its focal lengths and slit widths, and it can be configured to hold either 35mm or medium-format film. I also intended to operate it with a high degree of precision. It is a 'slit-scan' camera that makes photographs by exposing one thin vertical slit at a time. Then, by turning two dials with minutely fine increments, a complex gear-based mechanism slowly rotates the camera's view while simultaneously advancing the film inside its light-tight chamber. Calculating exposure times is a multifaceted procedure that needs to

account for the size of the pinhole, the sensitivity of the film, the width of the slit and the speed at which the camera is rotated. I developed mathematical formulae in order to make these calculations easier to perform in the field. These were written on the back of the camera, along with a log that recorded the details of each exposure I had taken.

The formulae and log were written in pencil.

(Right page) Formulae and exposure log on the rear face of *Arc*.

Slit width to Degree Converter (Assumes 220gall)

0.3	1/2	0.6	1°	1.2	2°	3	5°	6	10°	12	20°
0.3	1/2	0.6	1°	1.2	2°	3	5°	6	10°	12	20°

• Total length of film: $\pm 1332\text{mm}$ @ 35mm (OR 2296°)
 * Distance advanced = [degrees advanced] \times 0.58
 ⇒ Initial Advance after loading film = 90°

Title	Meter		
dd/mm - degrees	Seconds per degree	"	ISO 125 / f5.6 / 50
Pitchie Quad	150/25 / f5.6 / 250	" (26mm)	8p4 (+2); 4p1 (+1)
02/06/21 - 90° (1.2m)	per p (+2)	11/1400	2p1 (+0); 1p1 (-1)
"	"	"	"
"	2s per 1° (+1)	"	1p2 (-2); 2p5 (-3)
"	350-256	Drama building	ISO 125 / f5.6 / 250 slide
"	1p1 (+0); 1p1 Swing (+0)	08/16/21 - 60° (1.2m)	11/1400 ; 5p1 (+3)
"	"	"	"
"	15p1 (-1); 8p5 (+0)	"	128 shade
Pitchie Grand Floor	160/25 / f5.6 / 64	"	4p2 (+1); 1p2 (+0)
02/06/21 - 90°	4p1 (+0); 3p1 (+1)	tilted up (3mm)	1320 engine
			8p2 (+1); 1p1 (+2)

Shutter speed Conversion for Aperture (Assuming f/10)

1/8	1/8	1/8	1/8
1/16	1/16	1/16	1/16
1/32	1/32	1/32	1/32
1/64	1/64	1/64	1/64
1/128	1/128	1/128	1/128
1/256	1/256	1/256	1/256
1/512	1/512	1/512	1/512
1/1024	1/1024	1/1024	1/1024



Slit Width to Degree Converter (Assumes 22.9mm)

Slit-width	0.3	0.6	1.2	3	6	12
Degrees	1/2	1	2	5	10	20

• Total length of film: 2132 mm @ 35 mm (or $3.296''$)
 * Distance advanced = [Degrees advanced] \times 0.358
 Initial Advance after loading film = 905 (35mm)
 374 (121-127)

Time	Meter
0.5	0.5
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
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99	99
100	100

Shutter Speed Conversion for Aperture (Assuming f/11)

Final	1/500	1/256	1/128	1/64	1/32	1/16	1/8	1/4	1/2
Aperture	f/11	f/16	f/22	f/32	f/45	f/63	f/89	f/125	f/180

One day, shortly after exhibiting the camera, I stored it in the boot of my car. About two weeks later I retrieved it and found that the log had been rubbed away for the most part, leaving a smeared cloud of graphite with faint traces of the letters and numbers that were previously inscribed onto the paper surface. The detailed record of my exposure data was no longer legible.

I was intrigued by the idea that even in this unintentional exposure the camera was still able to produce an image with fine texture and tonal nuance. What made the mishap more compelling was how the process that created the image so starkly contradicted the highly procedural method by which I had designed the camera to operate. The camera's movements were not fine rotations on a complex gear mechanism mounted onto a stable tripod, but a series of agitations that caused the camera to slide back and forth across the car boot's fabric surface. Quite ironically, light was neither required nor present at all in the

dark confines of the boot. The irony is extended by the fact that the image is not the result of exposure, but erasure. It effaced the log's meticulously detailed data, thus undermining my attempts at being thorough or having control over my process.

With the above in mind, this research project explores the tensions between the deliberate, pre-determined elements of making art, and those unexpected, uncontrollable encounters with tools and materials that point to the inherent indeterminacy in the activity of physical and conceptual engagement with them. I am working with Bozalek's definition of the 'indeterminate' as that which cannot be known, measured or determined. Indeterminacy is often used synonymously with 'uncertainty', but can be distinguished in so far as uncertainty is an epistemological matter of not knowing or not being able to determine with surety, while indeterminacy is an ontological proposition asserting that entities are not static, fixed or definable and

therefore cannot be known or determined. (Bozalek, 2022:2). Critical to this difference is the notion that our experience of the world is not defined by discrete objects existing separate from one another, but by the contingent interactions¹ between objects as they change, shift and transform together (Bozalek, 2022:8). Thus, while I do use the term ‘uncertainty’ throughout this text, it emerges from the depth of complexity that underlies the world and our experience of it. In this way, what is ‘pre-determined’ is simply a human ideal that is manifest in the world while being entirely subject to the inherent indeterminacy of our experience of it. I have found this to be a very useful way of characterising the unexpected and unanticipated results of my attempt to create structure and order in my creative practice and research.

This dissertation is divided into two chapters. In chapter one I present a discussion on pre-determined plans and encounters with indeterminacy as necessary elements of

art production. My discussion will consider rigidly-defined approaches of art production and more experimental, open-ended approaches in 1960s art discourse. Specific attention is given to the works of Robert Morris, who adopted both approaches in his practice during the 1960s. His artworks and theories, along with that of his contemporaries, provide critical insight into the evolving and splintering understandings of the relationship between the art objects and the means of their production at the time. While these two antecedents resonate with key aspects of my work, neither of them adequately account for my core research inquiry which explores a recursive method of art production where the activity of making art can be a means of encountering indeterminacy and coming to a more nuanced understanding of it. This is discussed in relation to select works by contemporary artists.

The discussion in chapter one provides a theoretical and art historical foundation for a discussion of my own work in chapter two.

1. It is worth acknowledging that Bozalek rejects the term ‘interaction’ in favour of ‘intra-action’, as the former still assumes that objects are separate from one another (Bozalek, 2022:8). I continue to use the former, as many of the artists and theorists I refer to use the former while implying the latter. An extensive discussion on these terms is outside the scope of this dissertation.

I frame my project around the production of one object. The object is conceptualised with a pre-determined purpose and extensive, multifaceted production requirements that offers a rigid framework for ongoing creative activity. The object in question is an enclosed, light-tight chamber structure, which was initially intended to provide me with a visually-controlled space in which I could undertake a focused investigation of the physical and material conditions of photographic practice. Similarly to *Arc*, I encountered moments during the chamber's production where the tools and materials I was working with demonstrated unexpected and uncontrollable behaviour. My methodology involved being receptive to these encounters, reading them

as manifestations of the indeterminate conditions of art making capable of extending or subverting the conceptual significance of the materials I was using, the usefulness of the forms I was producing, and the pre-determined purpose of the chamber itself. I then responded by using these encounters as starting points for further avenues of creative inquiry into the relationship between my attempts at establishing my own sense of order, against the tendencies of objects and materials to undermine those efforts. In this way, the broader project becomes a means of exploring the continuously shifting dynamic between human systems of order and a material world outside of our control.

Chapter One:

Between Pre-determined Ends and Indeterminate Means

Any inquiry into deliberate acts and unexpected encounters in art production is fundamentally an inquiry into art processes rather than art products, and while the objects and experiences presented in *Out of Order* are what can be considered ‘end-results’, my research has primarily been concerned with the processes by which the works emerged. In this section I will discuss a range of approaches to the role that artistic process plays in the production and presentation of art. Of critical interest are the elements of this process that are deliberate and pre-determined, as well as those that are indeterminate and uncontrollable.

The concerns I am raising here were significant subjects of critical inquiry in American art discourse in the 1960s and ‘70s. This was a tumultuous period in which artists, curators and theorists explored a diverse range of attitudes to artistic production and expression that questioned the nature of art itself. To account for the complexity of this period is beyond the scope of this dissertation². Rather, my discussion will focus on the work of Robert Morris, whose sustained and varied inquiries into artistic process includes both pre-determined and indeterminate approaches. His artworks and theories along with that of his contemporaries provide

2. An indication of its complexity is acutely demonstrated by Lucy Lippard (1973) in her seminal text ‘Six Years: the De-materialisation of the Art Object’ that presents a highly fragmented account of the development of the broader landscape of Conceptual Art through this period from her own personal experience of it. Kim Grant (2017:191) discusses this period through the lens of process-oriented practice, detailing a broad spectrum of approaches lacking any clearly definable boundaries.

critical insight into how artists perceived, conceptualized, valued and rendered the particularities of making art. The purpose of this discussion is not to define boundaries by which the various practices of this period can be categorized as these boundaries were extremely porous. Rather, my aim is to highlight specific attitudes that correlate with my own understanding of art production

which was itself an evolving process. These art historical antecedents will be extended through a discussion of works by contemporary artists that explore the recursive relationship between the artworks they produce and the means of its production, and the dynamic relationship between their deliberate acts and the inherent indeterminacy of their practice.



Robert Morris.
Box with the Sound of Its Own Making, 1961.
Wood, internal speaker, wooden cube.

Robert Morris

Morris' work has had a significant influence on my research. His artworks and writings are a useful point of reference for three reasons. Firstly, artistic process was a prominent and ongoing subject of inquiry for him as evidenced by the dramatic shifts in his practice throughout his career. Secondly, he experimented with and helped establish a number of key modes of artistic thinking (Lippard, 1973:VIII). This included both the rigidly-defined approaches of Minimal art as well as the fervent embrace of indeterminacy in Process art. Lastly, his concerns often revolved around the human body, either in the artist's physical interactions with tools and materials or in the role that sensory perception plays in one's sense of one's

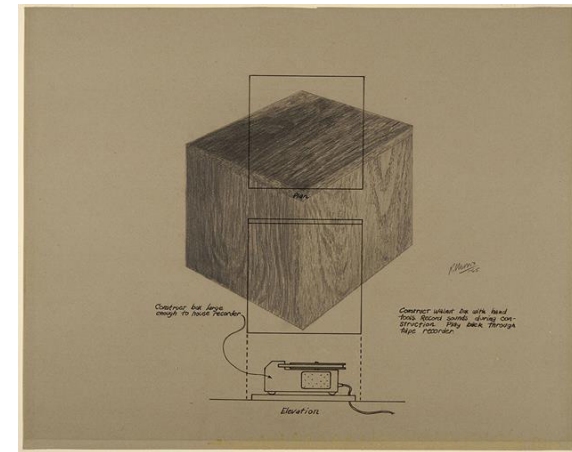
surrounding environment. These interests reflect the concerns of my research project and are a useful means of framing my discussion.

Morris' work reveals insights into the relationship between humans and materials as they interact. This is evident in *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*, 1961, which is a work I have returned to many times in text and thought. It is a time-based sculpture consisting of a plainly constructed wooden box that conceals an audio device that plays a three-and-a-half-hour recording of said box's production. As a physical object, it takes the form of a cube measuring 24.8cm in length, width and height, built from planks of solid walnut. These are joined using basic

butt joints strengthened with visible dowels, evoking a sense of rigid construction in a way that mitre joints and hidden dowels would not. Its surface is finished with a varnish that accentuates the walnut's grain. It therefore presents itself as a well-made³ wooden box, unobtrusive in size, yet complete and self-contained. These formal elements strongly suggest that the box was the result of a deliberate, intentional process, which is more explicitly suggested in a concept drawing for the box signed by Morris. The inscription "Construct walnut box with hand tools. Record sounds during construction. Play back through tape recorder" reads like a statement of intent established prior to the box's production. "Construct box large enough to house recorder" indicates that the box's dimensions were not arbitrary, but predicated on its function as a container for the cassette player. These inscriptions suggest that the artwork as both physical object and idea were determined prior to its production.

True to plan, the artwork's visual

presentation is accompanied by the sounds of the measuring, sawing, hammering, drilling, screwing and sanding involved in the objects production. Thus, everyday woodworking tools are implicated in the process. Not just tools, but the artist himself, who is heard handling the tools while occasionally taking breaks (Krauss, 1994:4, Paice, 1994:104, Webb, 2017). The fact that the box's production is portrayed through an audio recording is important here. According to W.J.T Mitchell (2015), it represents "another kind of writing emanating from the artist, the phono-graphic traces of the hammering, sawing, and painting". While photographic documentation would be able to represent tools, materials and the artist as separate entities, the sound recording can only represent them through their interaction. The saw is revealed as it cuts through wood. The artist is revealed through his handling of the saw. The audio recording thus represents process as a system of interaction between the artist, the tools, and the materials involved.



Robert Morris.

Drawing for the Box with the Sound of Its Own Making, 1965.
Graphite and black marker on paper and plastic.

3. This is emphasized by artist and art theorist Katsuhiko Yamaguchi (1962:7), who described *Box with the Sound of its Own Making* as "so well made it caught me by surprise." The newspaper report was originally published in Yomiuri Shimbun Newspaper, Tokyo, then republished in the exhibition catalogue for 1963—*Boxing Match Revisited, 4 Sculptors: Arakawa, Ay-O, Morris, Yoshimura* by Castelli Gallery (2019:22).

In this way, the artwork presents itself to the viewer through two separate⁴ representational modes in dialogue with one another. Its visual mode presents the end result of the artist's pre-determined production – a singular object in three-dimensional space that appears complete, well built⁵ and unchanging. This is juxtaposed with an aural experience that describes the object's production through the sounds of multiple entities in contingent interaction. This description does not occupy physical space, but unfolds through time (Potts, 2018:11).

These two modes of representation reflect two distinct approaches to art production that Morris will go on to develop throughout

the 1960s. On one hand, the physical form anticipates Morris' Minimalist 'objects' that I will discuss in the next section. On the other, the sounds of Morris making the object conveys his interest in finding meaning in the artist's interaction with tools and materials that he will explore in his works of Process art discussed later. In his choice to present the artwork as both end-product and the means of its production, Morris sets up a number of self-referential tensions including those between sound and image, space and time, past and present, and labour and product, all of which gestures toward the complexity underlying the simplest of objects.

4. In an interview with Paul Cummings, Morris explains how the artwork separates the process from the object. As he states, "On the one hand you do have the process and it's time, literally time, it's a sound. And on the other hand you have the object which is spatial. So that was a way of dealing with the two things by separating them." (Cummings & Morris, 1968)

5. The terms 'well-built' and 'well built' are important terms that feature throughout my text. The discrepancies in their hyphenation are due to shifts in the grammar of their usage. The two terms connote the same meaning.

Well-built Objects

A number of formal elements Morris used in *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* prefigured the tendencies of Minimal art⁶ that he and his contemporaries would soon explore. The emergence of Minimal art was, in part, a reaction to certain trends in Abstract Expressionism and Pop art that were dominant during the 1950s and early 1960s respectively. Against their respective interests in artistic self-expression and popular culture iconography, Minimal art sought to create self-contained objects that removed all traces of expression and external reference (Marzona, 2004:11). Both Morris and artist-theorist Donald Judd made significant contributions toward formulating this stance. In *Specific Objects*, Judd (1965b) highlighted

his perceived ‘problem’ with paintings that relied on illusionism and composition of symbolically related parts. It presented a pictorial space that gave the illusion of physical space and failed to recognize its own objecthood. The solution was to create works that minimize evidence of personal expression and symbolism and emphasize the artwork as a physical object occupying actual space. As Judd (1965b:184) stated, “It isn’t necessary for a work to have a lot of things to look at, to compare, to analyze one by one, to contemplate. The thing as a whole, its quality as a whole, is what is interesting.” These assertions were echoed by Morris. The ‘objects’ or ‘structures’, as he referred to these artworks, were non-imagistic, not relying on

6. This essay uses the terms ‘Minimal’, ‘Minimalism’ and ‘Minimalist’ in reference to Minimal art as described in these paragraphs. This is not to be confused with ‘minimalism’, the lifestyle practice of simplified living that seeks to improve one’s quality of life by reducing one’s possessions, obligations and interests.

figurative or metaphorical content outside of themselves, but able to stand autonomously as whole, complete, and self-contained (Morris, 1966b:17). This represented a particular understanding of the nature of the artwork, not as a vessel for communicating artistic expression or external reference, but as an object occupying three-dimensional space in relation to the human viewer and its surrounding environment.

The Minimalist impetus to explore objects that were 'whole' and 'complete' lead to certain visual tendencies and preferred production methods. Most immediately

evident is the use of reductive geometric forms with flat faces and straight edges. Rectangular and cubic forms in particular have a certain usefulness or handiness that is evident in their varied use in painting, architecture, and sculpture (Judd, 1965:181; Morris, 1968:41). Some of these artworks are single objects, as is the case in *Box with Sound*. In other cases, the artwork is a set of repeating 'units' uniformly arranged in serial or grid-like formations. In Carl Andre's *Equivalent V*, 1966, the artist arranges 120 bricks flat on the ground in a neatly arranged 12 x 5 x 2 grid formation. The bricks'

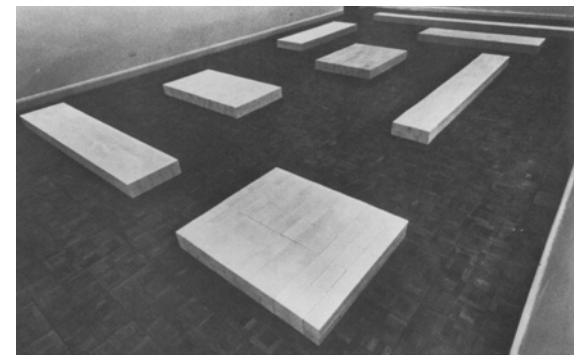
90-degree angles and consistency of form provides a level of congruency that lends itself to uniform arrangement. It is part of a series of eight works that have all the same total weight, volume and two-brick height, but differ in how the bricks are configured. In *Equivalent VIII*, the work is assembled in a 10 x 6 x 2 formation and the brick orientation is rotated 90 degrees (Inaba, 1999:46). This emphasizes the rectangle's potential for modularity – that is, the degree to which a collection of units can be separated into individual parts and recombined in a variety of different ways.



Carl Andre. *Equivalent V*, 1966-69.
Firebricks, 120 units.



Carl Andre. *Equivalent VIII*, 1966-69.
Firebricks, 120 units.



Carl Andre. *Equivalent*, 1966.
Installation View.



Donald Judd. *Untitled*, 1966.
Galvanized iron, 10 units.

Donald Judd's *Untitled*, 1966, employs similar strategies. It is made up of ten cuboid units mounted to a wall and 'stacked' vertically across the full height of the wall. Each unit is 22.9 x 101.6 x 78.7cm in dimension and consists of five galvanised steel sides. Judd produced a number of closely similar variants of this stack throughout his career. In these works, the units are distributed evenly, with the space between each unit being equivalent to the unit height. In order to maintain a uniform spatial distribution regardless of the height of the wall, Judd varied the number of units depending on the height of the wall on which it was mounted (Marzona, 2004:56). Much like the modularity of Andre's bricks, Judd's ability to add or remove units as needed for a particular wall demonstrates a certain flexibility that is indicative of the handiness of the cube for constructing form in variable configurations. In both Andre and Judd's works, their degree of consistency in form and arrangement evoke a strong sense of wholeness despite the fact that Andre's bricks

were not fixed together, and despite Judd's stacked units not being physically connected to one another.

For Morris, rigid, industrial materials were useful for constructing formally consistent objects, but these considerations were subordinate to the object's form. As Morris (1968:45) states, "In object-type art process is not visible. Materials often are. When they are, their reasonableness is usually apparent. Rigid industrial materials go together at right angles with great ease. But it is the a priori⁷ valuation of the well built that dictates the materials."

For his *Equivalent* series, Andre used lime-sand bricks in the work's original presentation in 1966, and firebricks when it was recreated for an exhibition in 1969. Each of these two types of bricks have different physical advantages over the other depending on the context of their usage, yet the ease at which one can be replaced with the other points to their general use-value as an object for rigid construction, with little sensitivity given to

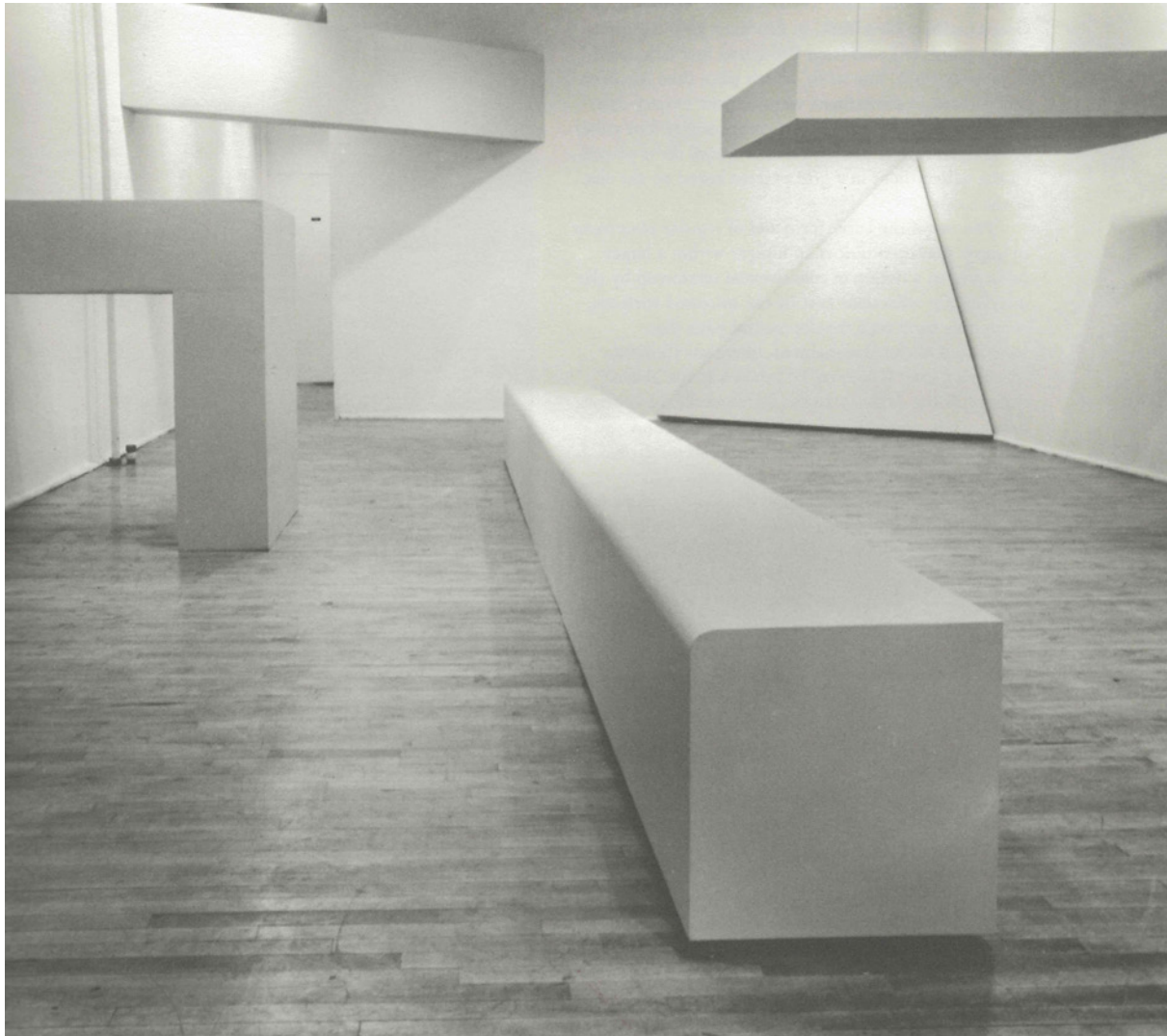
their unique specificity. Judd used galvanised steel sheets for *Untitled*, but created numerous variations on the stack form that experimented with a wide range of sheet materials including galvanised iron, stainless steel, various translucencies of acrylic plastic, anodized aluminium, copper, mirrors and more, all with varying colours and surface finishes.

The minimization of artistic expression did not stop at removing simple organic bodily gestures. Artists placed significant emphasis on leaving little to no trace of how the object was made⁸. In order to implement

this, the objects' physical dimensions and production plan were detailed in advance. Industrial tools and techniques allowed artists to create precise forms. This drive led some artists to employ skilled manufacturers to fabricate their works for them (Colpitt, 1993:18). This is evident in the progression of Judd's early work. In his first solo exhibition in 1963, Judd exhibited five box shaped works all of which were made by hand. Unsatisfied with the results of his labour, he began outsourcing his production to commercial manufacturer Bernstein Brothers the following year (Marzona, 2004:18).

7. This is a priori in its literal sense – that which can be said in advance (Casey, 1974:361).

8. This attitude to artistic process is noteworthy in relation to my earlier discussion regarding Morris' *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*. As a physical object, *Box with Sound* presents itself as a cubic form, rigidly built from flat pieces of solid wood in line with Minimalist visual strategies. However, while Minimalist tendencies sought to efface evidence of the artist's hand, *Box With Sound* explicitly emphasizes it by not hiding its dowels and butt joint construction, and more so through its audio playback.



Robert Morris. *Plywood Show*, 1965.
Painted Plywood.
Installation view.

Morris' own objects were notably distinct from those of Judd and Andre. In 1964, he staged *Plywood Show*, an exhibition of seven large grey geometric sculptures constructed out of plywood. In contrast to Judd and Andre's sets of repeating blocks in uniform arrangement, each of Morris's objects were large in scale, unique in form, and strategically distributed in a way that referenced the gallery room's architecture (Marzona, 2004:23). According to Morris, these characteristics engaged the viewer in bodily-perceptual terms, that is, by a three-dimensional object whose form was dependent upon the viewer's own position and proximity in relation to it. This relational experience was an ongoing process, as the viewer's movements around the objects and through the room would shift the scale and proportions of the flat planes and shadows that define the objects' forms. Thus, the viewer themselves extended the work into the fourth dimension constituting time. As Morris expressed, "simplicity of shape does not necessarily equate with simplicity

of experience. Unitary forms do not reduce relationships. They order them.” (Morris, 1966a:8). The role of the viewer’s bodily-perceptual engagement of the work was a critical component for the work’s completion.

Across the elements of form, method and material, a recurring characteristic was that the decision-making process was overtly *a priori* in nature, where most if not all the decisions were established prior to the art object’s actual production as opposed to being developed during an indeterminate making process. Furthermore, emphasizing geometric forms and uniformity imbued the works and the larger environment with a sense of rigidity and order while also making it possible to draw up instructions and dimensional specifications

which skilled artisans, assistants, or the artist themselves could execute. The specific decisions regarding materials and methods were made based on their reasonableness for achieving the desired end form.

The strategies discussed here illustrate two notable aspects of Minimalist strategies of object production that will be relevant when discussing my own practice. First is that it is a predominately *a priori* mode of making where decisions are predicated on constructing whole, complete, well built, and self-contained objects out of rigid materials and precise industrial techniques. Second is the notion that viewing art is itself a perceptual process, contingent on the viewer’s body in relation to other objects and the larger viewing space.

Unstable Matter

The latter half of the 1960s was a period of radically divergent and exploratory development in western art. Artists were fervently rethinking the nature of art and the significance of artistic practice (Lippard, 1973:5). Morris' own practice underwent a significant shift away from his austere Minimalist objects toward a more open-ended approach to art production that centred the artist's physical engagement with objects and materials.

The idea that art lies in the activity of making is succinctly illustrated in Richard Serra's *Verb List*, 1967, a hand-written list of actions – including 'to roll', 'to crease', and 'to fold' – that reflect specific procedures and interactions with materials that were

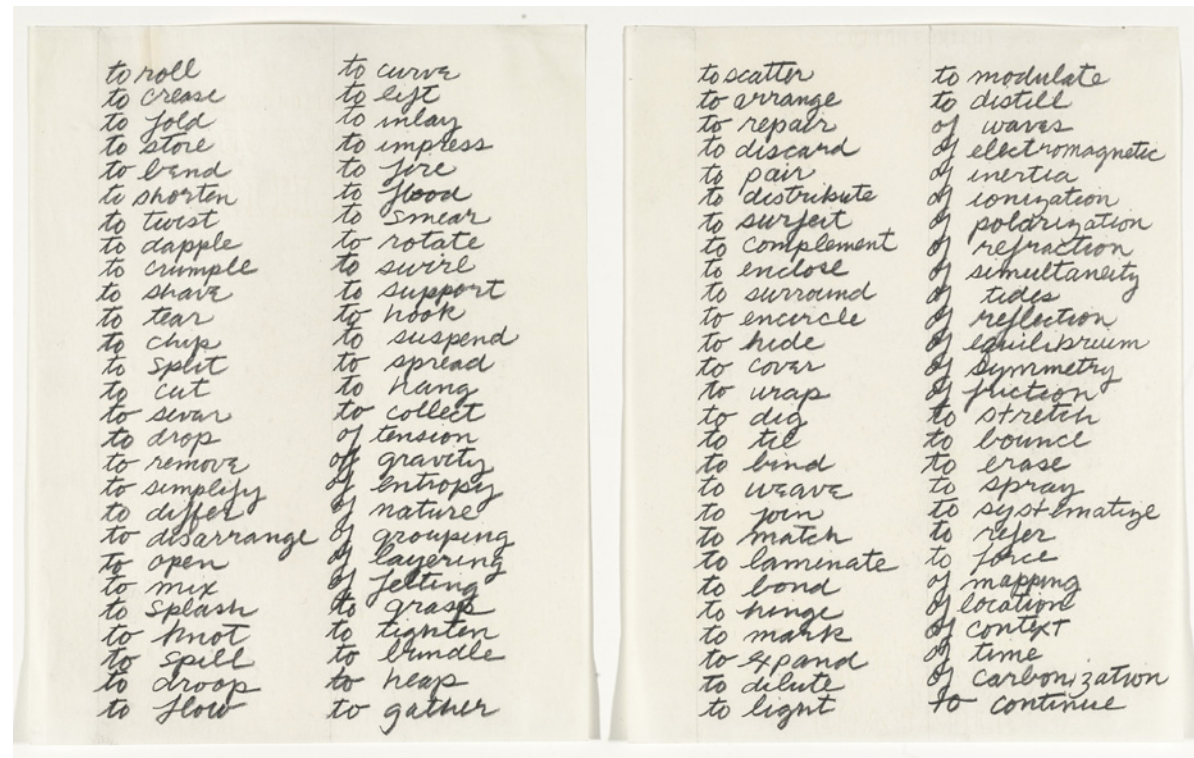
identifiable in his own artworks as well as those of Morris and other artists associated with this sensibility during this time (Grant, 2017:201).

This sensibility would later become known as 'Process art'. The term describes an exploratory attitude resulting in a diverse range of works, eluding any singular, definitive statement of purpose or intent⁹. Robert Pincus-Witten (1977:16) uses the term 'Process art' to describe a narrow scope of practices peaking between 1968 and 1970. He describes these practices as emphasizing "the process of making, a process so emphatic as to be seen as the primary content of the work itself". According to Pincus-Witten, these artists sought to dispossess the art 'object' of

9. In her extensive study of the development of artistic process as a theme in western art, Kim Grant (2017:191) uses the term to describe an overarching concern encompassing a wide variety of practices between the 1950s and '70s. Such a broad framing of process is outside the scope of this dissertation.

10. While a number of artists producing work in this timeframe resonate with my work, my research employs strategies that conflict with a number of core principles often ascribed to this subset of artists – most notably their rejection of construction as a method of making, their rejection of rigid materials, and their emphatic critique of the art object. Therefore, I will be relying on the artworks and writings of Morris to advance my discussion.

its significance as that which holds the work's artistic value. It is seen as a remnant of the material changes and physical procedures by which the art object was formed. In this way, these works treat the completed art object as a secondary concern¹⁰.



Richard Serra. *Verb List*, 1967.
Pencil on two sheets of paper.

For the purposes of my discussion I will rely on the concerns articulated by Morris, whose particular interest in how the indeterminacy revealed in interactions with materials can be used to subvert his previous a priori approach¹¹.

Morris' turn away from his Minimalist objects was prompted by certain problems that he outlined in his essay entitled *Anti Form* (1968). Speaking on the short-comings of Minimalist tendencies, he noted that "it is the a priori valuation of the well built that dictates the materials. The well-built form of objects preceded any consideration of means. Materials themselves have been limited to those that efficiently make the general object form." (Morris, 1968:46). His concern was that in using rigid industrial materials like plywood, stainless steel or acrylic sheets to construct generalised geometric objects, the artwork's material quality became entirely subservient to its form. This not only reduced the material to a mere means-to-an-end, but it also reduced the artist's production to a

rational decision-making process alienated from the experience of making art¹².

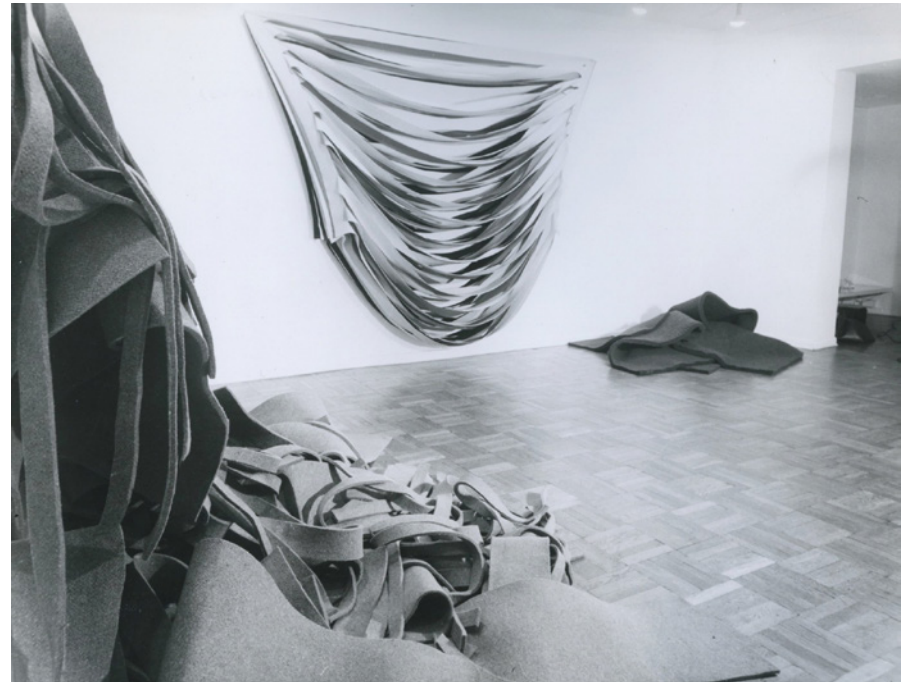
Morris ended his *Anti form* essay identifying a 'new tendency' in art in which non-rigid materials were being subjected to a variety of uncontrolled forces. In the same month that the essay was published he exhibited several felt-based sculptures at Leo Castelli Gallery in New York. The works presented abstract forms made from layers of sheets of industrial felt of varying thicknesses. These sheets were cut with several rectangular, straight-edged cuts and hung against the wall, allowing the felt to fall and tangle down the wall, spilling into piles on the floor. These felt works reflected a broader interest amongst process artists which Morris referred to as 'automation', where artists sought to "remove taste and the personal touch by co-opting forces, images, and processes to replace a step formerly taken in a directing or deciding way by the artist" (Morris, 1970:87). Process artists explored this strategy by working with soft, malleable, or fragmented materials like rubber, felt,

11. The specifics of Morris' shift in concern was worked out through different areas of his practice. Its theoretical base was explicated in notable essays including *Anti form*, *Notes on Sculpture IV* (1969) and *Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making* (1970). He also organized *9 at Leo Castelli* (1968), a group show that included nine artists that demonstrated these tendencies. Along with his artworks, these were key contributions to the overall development of what became known as Process art (Grant, 2017:193).

12. In a later essay, Morris (1970:77) articulated this more sharply stating that "the entire stance of a priori systems according to which subsequent physical making followed or was made manifest are idealist-oriented systems that run from Duchamp down through the logical systems of Johns and Stella to the totally physically paralyzed conclusions of Conceptual art." Morris' primary contention, therefore, is that an overtly controlled methodology based exclusively on ideas does not concern itself with the particularities of the materials being used.



Robert Morris.
Installation view of *Fibreglass, Felt*, 1968.
Leo Castelli Gallery, NY.



Robert Morris.
Installation view of *Fibreglass, Felt*, 1968.
Leo Castelli Gallery, NY.

latex, wax, molten lead, and industrial thread to create forms that emphasized the material's evocative physical qualities. These materials would be subjected to forces like gravity or heat which catalysed the process of forming. Morris' felt works that tumbled and tangled exemplified this tendency, as did Eva Hesse's fibreglass cylinders that buckled, Lynda Benglis' polyurethane foam that oozed, and Richard Serra's molten lead that splashed. For those processes that required time for liquid and viscous materials to dry, to cure, or to cool down into amorphous solids, the artists often allowed the process to continue uninterrupted. Those materials that did not harden remained in an indefinite state of instability or flux (Grant, 2017:193).

For Morris, this new trajectory was a dialectical response to what had come before. If the Minimalist tendency involved *building* pre-determined, self-sufficient forms using reasonable materials, then Process art offered a counterpoint that was interested in indeterminate forms resulting from

the artist's physical engagement with the inherent qualities of their chosen materials. As Andrews (2021:60-61) describes, "the system that orders the work is not derived from a prior and external logical system, but from 'the "tendencies" inherent in a materials/process interaction'. In other words, forms are discovered in the activity of interacting with material properties. [...] The material, in a certain way, determines the working process and, more importantly for Morris, the process is made manifest in the work".

In this way, Morris' continued use of key elements of his Minimal art can be understood as a direct subversion of its rigid structures and uniform orders. In his felt works, the subversion is self-evident. Rectangular forms and parallel lines that were previously straight and rigid now curve, warp, stretch and tangle. The object no longer rests sturdily on the floor; it hangs limp, unable to support its own weight as it contorts under the strain of gravity. The form cannot possibly be pre-determined with Minimalist exactitude. Rather, the

artist's intervention works in tandem with the malleability of the material. These tensions that arise between control and contingency, between what is planned in advance and what cannot be foreseen, are the central theme in *Out of Order*.

Shortly after Morris' *Anti Form* article was published and his felt works were exhibited, Allen Kaprow (1968:32-33) responded by speaking on the general implausibility of escaping imposed structures. As he states:

Morris's new work [...] was made in a rectangular studio, to be shown in a rectangular gallery, reproduced in a rectangular magazine, in rectangular photographs, all aligned according to rectangular axes, for rectangular reading movements and rectangular thought patterns. (It is for good and sufficient reason that we are all "squares.") Morris's work, Pollock's, Oldenburg's, etc., function strictly in contrast to, or now and then in conflict with, their enframing

spaces. Ruled lines and measurable corners in such spaces tell us how far, how big, how soft, how atmospheric, indeed, how "amorphous" an art work is within these lines and corners. Rectilinearity, by definition, is relational; and so long as we live in a world dominated by this and other part-to-whole geometrical figures, we cannot talk about anti form or non form *except as one type of form in relation to another (rectilinear) type*.

Much of Kaprow's article takes aim at the title '*Anti Form*' and the assumption that Morris was intent on ridding his art of the rigid formal relationships that he had helped bring to prominence in the preceding years. However, what seems evident in Morris felt works is that, at its most fundamental level, it was not so much interested in creating end-forms devoid of intent. Rather, it subverted the notion that art is about form at all, replacing it with the idea that art can be a unique means of exploring how the human body exists in,

perceives of and relates to a physical world filled with uncertainty (Morris, 1970:90). Nevertheless, Kaprow's article raised a pertinent point. For better and for worse, we continue to live in a world filled with both an indeterminacy that Process artists sought to reveal and imposed systems of order that continue to endure to the contemporary. Both of these are notable aspects of my research project. Morris' conception of art has

allowed me to engage them simultaneously through a recursive method of artistic research where my attempts at establishing structure and order facilitate encounters with the indeterminacy of the world that not only complicate assumptions that the two modes are separable, but also offer alternative avenues for further research. This recursive method of art production will be the focus of the next section.

Recursive Method

In the previous two sections I discussed different ways that artists explored the significance of their creative processes in certain art historical discourses of the 1960s. I discussed Minimalist approaches that involved constructing well-built objects, as well as the more open-ended, experimental sensibility of Process art. While both approaches individually resonate with different elements of my practice, a critical point of interest in *Out of Order* is the constantly shifting dynamic between the two. I frame this as a recursive relationship between the pre-determined end-

results I seek to achieve, and the indeterminate means by which I seek to achieve them. In the activity of making, unexpected discoveries are encountered which complicate the preconceptions and prescriptions that frame the activity, thereby generating alternative avenues for further exploration. In this manner the expanded range of results, though personal and idiosyncratic, becomes a self-referential system of interrelated parts that reflect the tensions between deliberate attempts at ordering the world, and the indeterminacy inherent in engaging objects and materials.

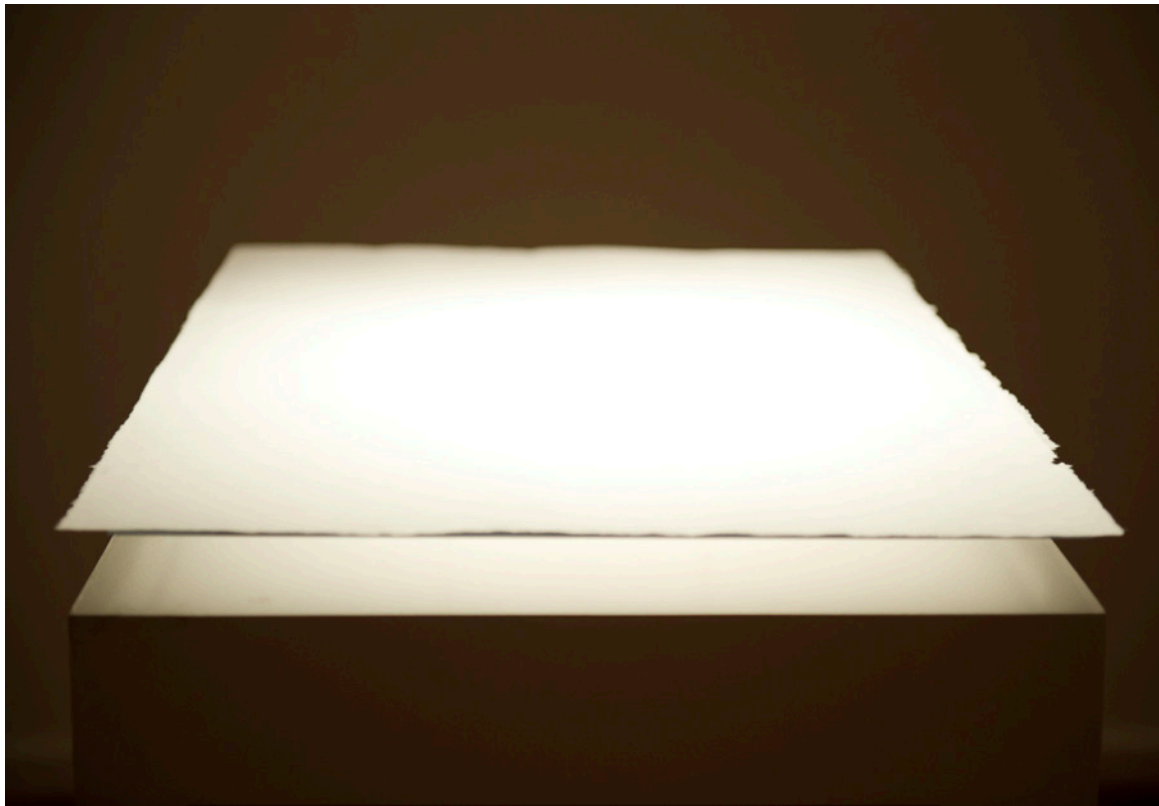
While the art historical references discussed earlier provide a foundation for the finer nuances in my work, my recursive approach to art production has been significantly influenced by some pivotal works by contemporary artists that I will briefly discuss here. These works by Dominique Edwards, Siemon Allen, and Penny Siopis explore the tensions between the artwork as end-result and the inherent indeterminacy of its making.

For Dominique Edwards, the activity of making things and working with materials is a means of gaining a deeper understanding of them as things in the world. As she states, “I have always considered myself to be a maker of things. The act or activity of making, and how things are made, is very important to me. The “how” contributes to the initial sense-making with regard to the “what” and informs my interaction with the material and my understanding of its poetic reference.” (Kronje & Edwards, 2012).

While this has been a central concern throughout Edwards’ career, *Keep* (2011) and *Waking* (2011) are two early works that are particularly resonant with my own practice. Both works emerged out of a paper-making process through which Edwards sought to

create sheets of drawing paper out of cotton garments that had belonged to her mother before her untimely death. While this imbues the material with specific meaning personal to Edwards, her larger body of work is centrally concerned with materials as trace or residue of process.

Keep is a set of three sheets of white cotton paper, hand-made by the artist with the assistance of Phumani Paper, an archival paper mill. The sheets are whole and appear fixed in form, yet they are thin, warping slightly, and have a deckle edge that points to their fibrous composition and hand-made production. The sheets are presented horizontally, each appearing to hover approximately five centimetres above its own dedicated plinth custom-built to the paper’s size.



Dominique Edwards. *Keep*, 2011.
Cotton Paper.

Keep represents the end-result¹³ of her paper-making process, and though it is quietly poignant in its own right, it very minimally engages with the particular transformation that produced it. The paper-making process involved a preparation phase that entailed carefully stripping the garments of all non-cotton items, followed by a pulping phase that included submerging it in water and pulverising it into a fine pulp¹⁴. In traditional paper-making the pulp is suspended in a vat and lifted out carefully with a mould and deckle. Edwards saved samples of the pulp at various stages which were frozen and set aside for what would later become *Waking*, a work that more directly reflects on Edwards' interest in her means of production.

Waking is a series of three video projections that depict the white cotton material as torn fragments and fibres floating gently against a black background. The videos begin with the fragments resting motionless at the bottom of the frame. They are then animated, which Edwards (2011:60) describes as “moving

slowly at first, as if waking or lulled by a gentle tide. The large mass of fibrous white evolves as it is systematically swept from its resting place into a vertical rise, ascending gently at first and gradually becoming more erratic¹⁵ in its spiral movements”. The fragments then slowly lose momentum and return to a state of rest at the bottom of the frame, only to be woken again in an infinite loop. The videos were recorded at extreme magnification and projected large enough to span most of the height of the wall (Edwards, 2011:58-60). In this way, Edwards provides a close up view of the fine details and gentle movements that occurred in the paper vat, but are not visibly evident in the completed sheets of paper.

Elaborating on *Waking*, Edwards states that “I am particularly curious about how things are what they are and tend to want to take them apart, look at the sum of their perceived totality and work with that. The materiality of the object is therefore very important to me; it is as if I need to come to a certain understanding of the material

13. Or “finished works” in Edwards' (2011:58) terms.

14. The entire process is more extensive than what is summarized here. For a more detailed account, see Edwards' *The Distance Between Us* (2011:54-58).

15. ‘Erratic’ is a curious description. I personally found the movements to be elegant and soothing, as if performing a dance. Edwards accounted for this in an interview, stating that “I cannot anticipate how someone would react to something that I have made. I also have no assumptions as to what a viewer might gain from my work.”



Dominique Edwards. *Waking*, 2011.
Video. Film Stills.

before I can resolve a piece. This process is one of discovery, and the work resulting from various enquiries inevitably evolves into something I had not anticipated. The work seems to make itself, and though I labour at it, hold it, look at it and think about it, I regularly feel as though I am not responsible for its existence. The making of my work is perhaps governed by this process, a curiosity, an unknown, which seems also to seep into the experience of viewing the work.” (Kronje & Edwards, 2012).

This explication highlights two key aspects of her work that resonate with my own. The first is the critical role that uncertainty and unexpected discoveries play in her broader methodology. Despite her commitment to following through with the process and arriving at the finished product, the activity of working with objects and materials, whether it be understood as ‘making’ or ‘taking apart’, necessarily involves an element of indeterminacy. And while Edwards describes her art production as one of ‘sense-making’,

achieving certainty is not critical to either her own conception of the work nor the viewer’s experience of it. The second is the recursive nature of this methodology. The encounter with indeterminacy is not displayed as is. Rather, her discoveries are thoughtfully considered in relation to the larger motivations that brought them into being. They inform and develop a more complex understanding of what objects are and how we relate to them.

By exhibiting *Keep* and *Waking* alongside one another, Edwards sets up a relationship between the end-result which she had set out to produce and a by-product¹⁶ of its production, highlighting certain formal tensions between the two. Where *Keep* presents the cotton as whole sheets of paper, *Waking* presents it in a fragmented, unfixed state. Another contrast can be seen in the works’ movement, or lack thereof. The act of animating the cotton fibres in a continuous cycle of rising and falling instils a sense of perpetual instability that never settles into the stillness evoked by the sheets of paper.

16. In manufacturing and production, the term ‘by-product’ refers to something that is produced as a result of making something else (Cambridge Dictionary, nd).

By incorporating these tensions Edwards is able to resist a narrow reading of death as final, static and complete, thus opening the works up to more complex notions of death in the mind of the viewer. For the person

performing the labour, it demonstrates how the act of going through with something and making decision in response to an unfolding, uncertain process can be a means of self-reflexive sense-making.



Dominique Edwards.
Installation view of *Keep*, 2011 and *Waking*, 2011.



Penny Siopis.
Process Documentation.
Pouring cold glue over ink on canvas.

While Edwards' receptiveness to unexpected encounters through material engagement resonates with my own practice, the two works are framed by a concern with the death of her mother and the effect that such a loss had on her sense of belonging to her childhood hometown. These themes imbue her artworks with an intimacy that is not present in my own work. For me, the tendencies and behaviours of the material as they emerge in the moment of interaction are of primary concern. This has become a focal point in the painting practice of Penny Siopis. In her more recent works, the artist has foregrounded her method of co-opting the uncontrollable qualities of materials and their interactions to complete her work, or what Morris described as 'automation'. Siopis creates paintings by combining cold glue and ink on horizontal canvas surfaces. These

substances are poured, splashed and squirted into compositions that are partially hidden by the opaque white glue. In some cases, the resulting marks allude to the gestural movements of the artist's body. The figurations that dominated her earlier practice are now an occasional feature. What is most emphatic is the degree of control that is handed over to other elements of the making process. Gravity plays a critical role, not only in how liquids are applied to the surface, but also in how they pool together and weigh down the surface, warping the canvas into irregular shapes. Cold glue also has a particular viscosity which when combined with ink congeals in uncontrollable ways. This mixing process is not entirely dependent on Siopis' physical activity as the substances continue to meld and flow on the canvas in a slow transition from liquid to solid. In addition to its viscosity, cold

glue has an opacity that limits Siopis' ability to assert form using sight. She refers to this as 'painting blind', as she (2018:12) states, "as the air dries the scene, the white cloud lifts, and colour contours emerge. What was opaque has turned transparent. Only now can you see what went on in that white cloud."

Chika Okeke-Agulu (2020:117) highlights the underlying dynamics at play here, as she states, "[...] just as she determines her media and the painterly action she might deploy, she must also become a spectator at some point to the unpredictable outcome of the material and optical transformation of the painting by the congealing process. What she has called material acts, then, is the sum and interplay of autonomous agencies of medium and artist."

These details reveal an interesting relationship between the completed painting

and the system of interrelations that brought it into being. With this in mind, the notion of 'painting blind' highlights how Siopis' production of these nuanced shifts in colour and tone were not a result of controlled visual composition that centres the artist as primary agent, but a more contingent relationship between the artist's body and the fluidity of glue and ink as they move under the weight of gravity through space and time. In this way, her method resonates with my own in the extent to which she hands over a significant portion of her compositional control to the physical qualities of the glue in combination with other materials and forces. In addition, the notion of becoming a 'spectator' resonates with Morris' notion of stepping aside and allowing the materials to complete the work, which in turn resonates with a number of moments in my own practice.



Siemon Allen. *Studio*, 2014.
Ink on paper, magnetic sheets, steel-infused paint, wood,
concrete blocks.

In the example above I highlighted the critical role that the indeterminacy of interacting with materials plays in the work of Penny Siopis. While giving attention to the particular tendencies and behaviours of materials features prominently in my own work, the materiality of Siopis' works is situated in a distinctly painterly practice that uses the canvas as a framing device on which her liquids are applied. My body of work has a more expanded scope that includes the artist's studio as a site of creative production.

In this regard, Siemon Allen's *Studio*, 2014 is a useful point of reference. It is a large-scale digital print that depicts a section of Allen's art studio floor. The image was captured with a flatbed scanner, printed at 1000% of its original scale and exhibited as a floating sheet with varying degrees of elevation across its surface. The resulting

artwork is both a sculptural object and an intricately detailed visual record portraying bits of tape, dog hair, burn marks, paint stains and other residual matter made by the artist and those who previously occupied the space.

According to Allen, the artwork "captures historical actions, (mine, my friends, previous owners) that have serendipitously built up over many years on this surface." (Adams & Allen, 2014). He also mentions that the space was used as a paint shop in the 1960s. This extends the represented time-frame beyond recent history to span major world events and social, political and economic shifts, while also indicating the space's continuity as a place that has an enduring association with visual creative activity. In this way, the marks and residue matter are 'documents', to use Allen's term, that reflect the layered

history of activities that brought about its current material condition. There is a clear disparity between how Allen describes the contents of his studio floor and the value-judgements that are generally ascribed to them. Detritus is swept away, production residue is considered incidental ‘by-products’, and workspace floors are functional surfaces that are rarely considered precious.

The elevated description that Allen ascribes to the seemingly mundane details of his studio floor is reflected in the particular methods and formal strategies Allen used in translating the surface into an artwork exhibited in a gallery space. By using a flatbed scanner as a recording device he is able to capture high-resolution digital images with an even distribution of light that offers clear and consistent image quality. Multiple images are captured and stitched together

to produce an intricately detailed record of the surface’s visual appearance. According to Allen, the effect of magnifying the image is “to bring the viewer closer to the surface, something akin to a microscopic view.” (Adams & Allen, 2014). This is further emphasized by his choice to exhibit the work as an uneven surface secured to magnetic sheets with steel infused paint, floating above the gallery floor. This not only closes the physical space between the viewer and the imaged floor, but also shifts the viewer’s apprehension of the floor from a ground to be walked on to a subject to be looked at.

Thus, by reproducing his studio floor with a consideration of how it is framed, shifting it in scale, proximity and form, Allen calls the viewer to look closely and consider the complex relationships between artworks and their processes and places of production.



Simon Allen.
Process Documentation.
Scanning for *Studio*, 2014.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to explore the nuanced ways that artists have concerned themselves with the significance of artistic process in the production and experience of art. Of critical concern has been the tensions between the deliberate, pre-determined aspects of making art, and the indeterminate, uncontrollable aspects that resist them.

Robert Morris' *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* was a seminal work for how emphatically it foregrounded the art making process in the exhibited artwork. In this way, the work represented a self-referential dynamic between the artwork as end-object and as a contingent system of relationships

between the artist, the tools and materials.

In the years that followed, Morris and other notable artists linked to Minimal art explored highly pre-determined methods of art production that emphasized constructing whole, complete, well-built objects. They adopted geometric forms chosen for their usefulness, materials for their ability to construct rigid form, and methods for their mechanical precision. In doing so, the viewer's attention was drawn to the importance of their own sensory perception in their experience of the artwork. By emphasizing the contingent relationship between the viewer and the artwork, artists intended to instil a self-awareness in the viewer that they were not simply looking at the work, but that they were in some sense part of the work.

In response to the dominance of Minimal art's rigid geometric forms and uniform structures, Morris and other artists began a fervent and wide-ranging exploration of indeterminate methods of art production that foregrounded the artists' physical interaction

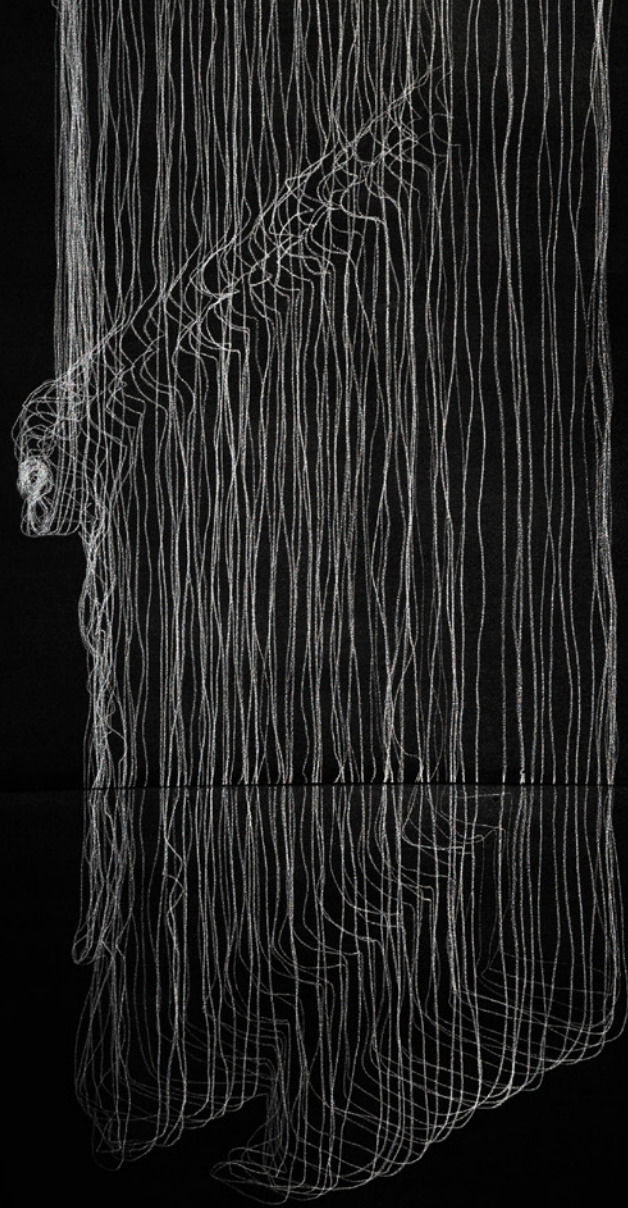
with soft, malleable, or fragmented materials subjected to external ‘completing’ forces, often resulting in non-uniform arrangements of material.

In the last section of this chapter I discussed the works of contemporary artists who explore the relationship between the artworks they produce and the particular processes by which they are made. For Dominique Edwards, the activity of making things or taking things apart is a means of coming to a deeper understanding of them. Uncertainty plays a critical role in this process, and the discoveries made offer alternative avenues for creative engagement. In Penny Siopis’ painting practice, the artist hands over much of her control to the other autonomous agents involved in making her paintings. And although Siopis’ process of applying paint to surface is notably physical and active, it is the unpredictable tendencies of cold glue, inks, the force of gravity and the canvas surface that complete the work. Siemon Allen explores the artist’s studio as a site of creative

production through the traces and residue that speak to its layered history of use. For Allen, the artwork is not only a trace of the place it was produced, it is an act of translation that frames the viewer’s engagement with the artist’s studio in a particular way.

Each of these works also situate the artists’ deliberate acts in relation to the indeterminacy encountered in making art. The complexity of these engagements are revealed when read alongside the ideas regarding process explored by Minimal artists and Process artists discussed in the earlier section. This is particularly important for the discussion of my work in the next section.

The purpose of this discussion has not been to provide an expansive account of all the nuanced attitudes to artistic process during the historical periods in question or in this contemporary moment. Rather, I have sought to highlight specific aspects of art production that correlate with ideas that I explore in my creative practice discussed in the next chapter of this text.



Chapter Two: Out of Order

In the previous chapter I discussed the importance of making art as an activity with significance in itself and not primarily as a means to an end. My discussion considered deliberate, pre-determined approaches predicated on constructing complete, well-built objects that emphasize rigid structure and uniform order. This was followed by a discussion on approaches that rejected these a priori notions in favour of experimenting with the idiosyncratic tendencies of specific materials and forces in a way that echoed the inherent indeterminacy of interacting with the world. While each approach resonates with certain aspects of my work, my prevailing

interest is in how both are necessary aspects of art, and that making art can be a means of revealing the inherent indeterminacy of the world and reflecting on the particular systems humans use to order it.

My methodology involved conceptualising a material object with a pre-determined purpose and extensive, multifaceted production requirements that would offer a rigid framework for ongoing creative activity. Throughout the object's physical production I remained receptive to unexpected and unintended encounters with the tools, materials and environment I was working with, reading them as manifestations of the

(Left page) Detail of resulting drawing from *Light Leak I*, 2023.
Graphite on PVA-coated medium density fibreboard.

indeterminate conditions of art making. The tensions between my preconceptions of my production and what unexpectedly emerged were used as starting points for further avenues of creative inquiry.

In this chapter I will discuss my body of work as a range of results that reflect the tensions that arose during the project. This chapter is made up of two specific sections. The first section entitled 'Frame/Work' focuses on the a priori elements of my production. In it I will describe the extent to which my production of *Chamber*, 2023 is framed by its initial end-purpose of providing a visually-controlled, unchanging environment in which I could undertake a focused investigation of the physical and material conditions of my photographic practice. With reference to a photographic work, *Stack*, 2023, I will highlight stacking and framing as aesthetic strategies that recall the tendencies of the a priori approaches to art

production discussed in chapter one. By doing so I seek to establish *Chamber's* production as the central framework that moves my research forward, embodying specific tendencies toward construction and ordering.

In 'Reframing Matter' I discuss the artworks generated in response to specific encounters with a material, tool or element of my studio environment that appeared to resist my attempts at establishing structure and order. These include audio-visual installations *Noise* and *Particle*, a pair of video works titled *Light Leak I* and *II*, and sculptural works including *Floor Lift*, *Fixed Errors I* and *II*. For each of these works I briefly describe the encounter that prompted it, and the tension that was produced between the indeterminacy revealed in that encounter and *Chamber's* pre-determined end. This will be discussed in relation to key ideas highlighted in the work of Edwards, Siopis and Allen from the previous chapter.

In framing my work this way I do not attempt to provide an exhaustive explication of meaning. The ambiguity in the works themselves allow for open-ended engagement, and the range of artistic references discussed in this dissertation offer a myriad of interpretive possibilities. Rather, this discussion is an attempt at situating my research in relation to the work of specific contemporary artists who adopt a recursive approach to their production that reflects on the relationship between the artworks they produce and the conditions by which the work emerges.

Frame/Work

Chamber was the starting point for much of the thinking and praxis in this research project. The work began as an idea to construct an enclosed, light-tight container structure that would provide a visually-controlled, unchanging environment in which I could undertake a focused investigation of the physical and material conditions of my photographic practice.

My decision to construct a dedicated space for my experiments was in large part an attempt at separating my own experimental, open-ended research from the prominent sense of uncertainty that was an existing condition of the art studio I was using. As a Master of Fine Art candidate at the Michaelis School of Fine Art I was allocated space

within a shared studio located on Hiddingh campus. This was valid for one academic year after which I would be allocated a different, unknown space for my second year, therefore requiring me to relocate my production. Thus, in accepting this offer, impermanence and uncertainty were inevitable conditions of my art production before it had begun.

The temporary nature of the art school studio was not just administrative; being a communal space that had housed an unknowable number of art students reshuffled on a yearly basis. Its surfaces and structures had accrued layers of material residue tracing the wide assortment of praxes it had facilitated.

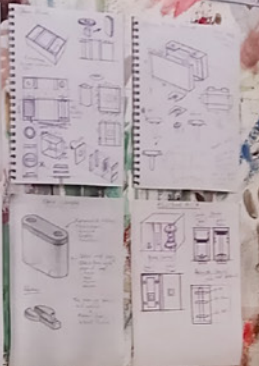
The floor was covered with thick sheets of protective plastic, loosely joined with clear

17. It is also worth noting that the room is used as an undergraduate and a postgraduate studio depending on the number of registrations of each respective pool of students. In addition, it is often used as an exhibition space at the end of each academic year. When this happens, all of the room's movable contents are removed, its floors cleaned and its walls painted white.

tape and spattered with white paint. The desk and locker that came with the studio bore the marks of the painting practices of its previous occupants. The temporary drywall panels that isolated me from my fellow colleagues were made of fragile masonite boards that were disintegrating from years of wear and tear. Their surfaces were covered, to various degrees, in vibrant colours, strokes of paint, masking tape, handwritten notes and the traced edges of paintings that were once adhered to them. In this way, the visual and material qualities of the space evidenced its core purpose of facilitating an ongoing series of discreet, open-ended artistic activities¹⁷.

(Page 49-51) Studio Documentation.
My 1st-year MFA studio shortly after moving in.





What have you been looking at?
What have you been thinking?
What have you been looking at?



- FRAMEWORKS -

- STRATEGIES -

Prime

Secondary

- NOTES -

// PRIMARY STANDARDS //

- CONCEPTUAL CAMERAS -

- MATERIALS -

This section of the wall is a large green board covered in various papers and sticky notes. The notes are organized into sections with yellow labels: 'FRAMEWORKS', 'STRATEGIES', 'NOTES', 'CONCEPTUAL CAMERAS', and 'MATERIALS'. Under 'STRATEGIES', there are sub-sections for 'Prime' and 'Secondary'. A pink board is visible to the right, also covered in papers and notes.



PRODUCTS / MISC





Studio Documentation.
Sunlight illuminating the floor of my 2nd year studio.



Process Documentation.
Experimenting with light in the late evening.

With this in mind I decided to construct *Chamber*, a workspace in which I could engage in a focused investigation of my open-ended experiments with light. This end-purpose framed how I comprehended the materials and methods used to create the object.

In order to regulate the amount of visual noise experienced in my studio, *Chamber* was conceived as an enclosed room structure with a pitch-black interior space. It was designed to measure 2.4m in height and 2.5m in diameter, extending higher and wider than my body can physically reach, thus providing adequate room for a wide variety of physical activities. It would have a door to ensure the structure could be entered easily and closed to shut out light. Its overall form would be cylindrical to ensure that any light that did occupy the space would be scattered evenly.



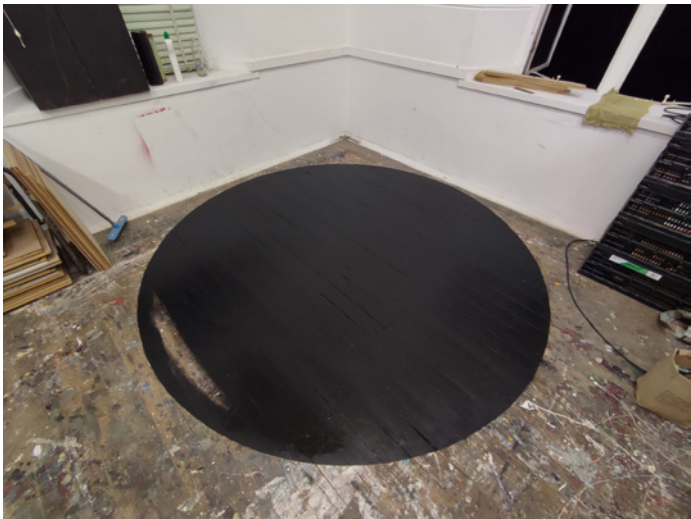
(Above) *Chamber*, 2023.
Assembled in 2nd year studio. Exterior view.

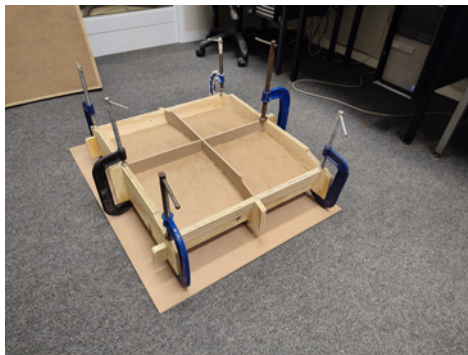
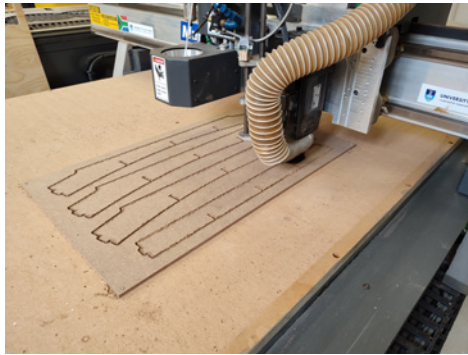
(Right page) *Chamber*, 2023.
Assembled in 2nd year studio. Interior view.





Process Documentation.
Covering a circular area of my 2nd year studio with black enamel paint.





Aside from establishing a sense of visual uniformity, *Chamber* was also meant to account for the fact that my production would need to be moved to other spaces during the project. To that end, its large structure was designed as an assembly of 48 identically-constructed rectangular panels, bolted together in a 12x4 panel arrangement that would be relatively easy to deconstruct, transport, and reconstruct elsewhere.

Each panel's curved interior face is held by a rigid frame made up of two uprights, two beams, and two crossing vertical and horizontal struts. It has a height of 60cm and a width of 65.5cm making it small and light enough to be easily carried in one hand, passed through doorways and stored in vehicles. While the panel's inner face is curved to create the internal cylindrical wall, the outer edges of its external frame are straight, allowing it to rest on flat surfaces or be stacked one on top of the other for space efficiency.

Process Documentation.
Cutting, sanding and assembling rectangular panels of *Chamber's* wall structure.



Process Documentation.
Assembling *Chamber's* wall structure.





Stack, 2023.
Giclée print on Hahnemühle Photo rag.

Despite my ultimate goal of engaging in experimental, open-ended making, my reliance on the versatility of reductive geometric forms and uniform arrangements indicate how *Chamber's* physical production involved an a priori approach where decisions were made in advance based on their reasonableness for achieving a pre-determined end. In this way, the early stages of my production reflected several key principles and strategies of the 'well-built' objects produced by Robert Morris, Donald Judd and Carl Andre discussed earlier.

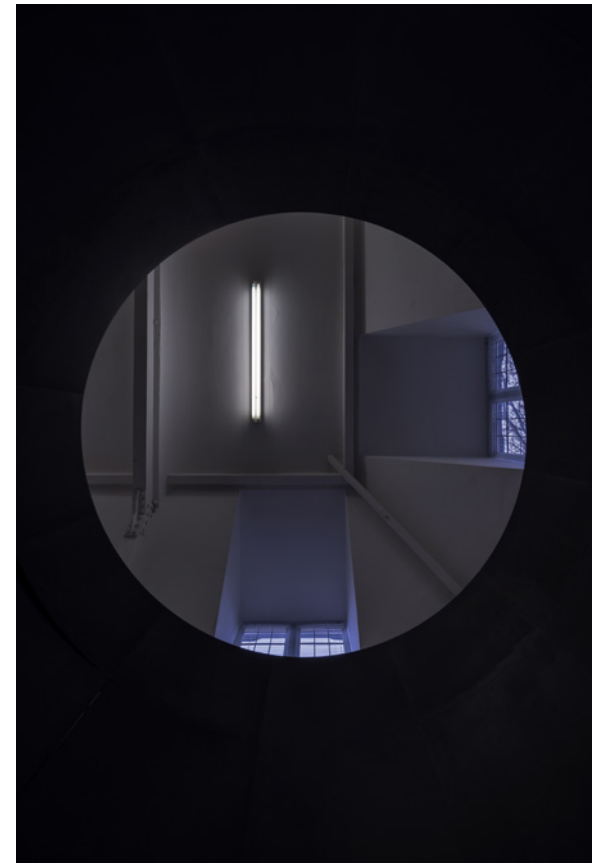
Of particular note are my use of 'stacking' and 'framing' as aesthetic strategies recurring

throughout my body of work. Both are alluded to in *Stack, 2023*, a photographic print depicting a neatly stacked column of wooden panels placed inside a circular section of floor in the corner of my second-year studio space. The photograph was taken at a particular stage during *Chamber's* production. At this point I had painted *Chamber's* floor black, thus delimiting the space that *Chamber's* panel structure would enclose. The panels themselves were in the gradual process of being cut, assembled and delivered to my studio one at a time. For much of this time, the panels were stacked on top of one another in various configurations awaiting assembly.



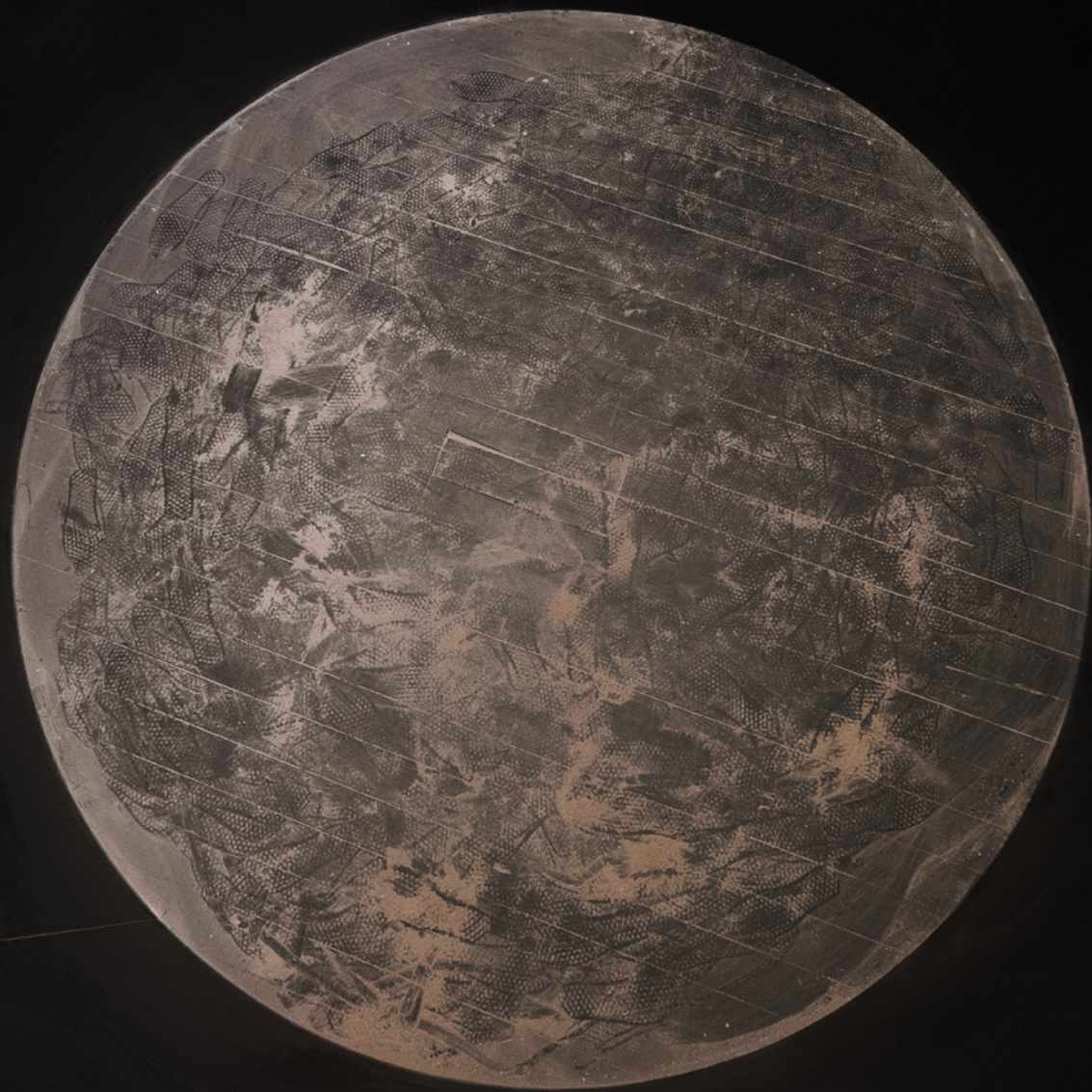
Process Documentation.
Chamber, 2023, (12 column configuration), in storage.

While these strategies recall aspects of the 'well-built' object, there are notable differences. Judd's stacked units, Andre's brick arrangements and Morris' *Plywood Show* involved creating three-dimensional objects precisely installed in relation to other objects and the architecture of the room. These were self-contained environments where notions of scale and proximity were centrally important, and the use of light was a crucial factor. This was a particularly reductive approach that confronted the viewer with their own bodily-perceptual relationship with the objects and the larger environment. By contrast, the primary end of *Chamber* was not to be an object pointing to the delimiting bounds of the environment. Rather, the object was intended to be its own enclosed environment that would contain my experimental, open-ended production.



(Above) Process Documentation.
View of the studio ceiling through *Chamber's* uncovered roof.

(Right page) Process Documentation.
Top-down view of *Chamber's* sawdust-covered floor.





Reframing Matter

In the previous section I elaborated on how *Chamber* was initially conceived to be an enclosed, light-tight environment, built for the purpose of providing a visually-controlled, unchanging working environment. I detailed the extent to which it embodies notions of rigid structure and uniform arrangement, particularly through formal strategies of framing and stacking which reflect my tendency toward constructing and ordering

my perception of a continuously changing environment. During *Chamber's* production, these attempts at imposing my own sense of order came into conflict with notable moments of indeterminacy that were revealed through my interactions with the materials, tools and working environments utilized in producing *Chamber*. The tensions that arise from these conflicts are the primary focus of this section.

(Left page) Process Documentation.
Cutting plywood frames for *Chamber's* wall structure on a CNC router. The plywood board is fixed to the router's bed, which is hidden under a thick layer of plywood chips.



Particle

One of *Chamber's* key functions was to subdue the amount of visual noise and unpredictable change that permeated my studio space. Its pitch-black interior surfaces provided an effective contribution to achieving that end.

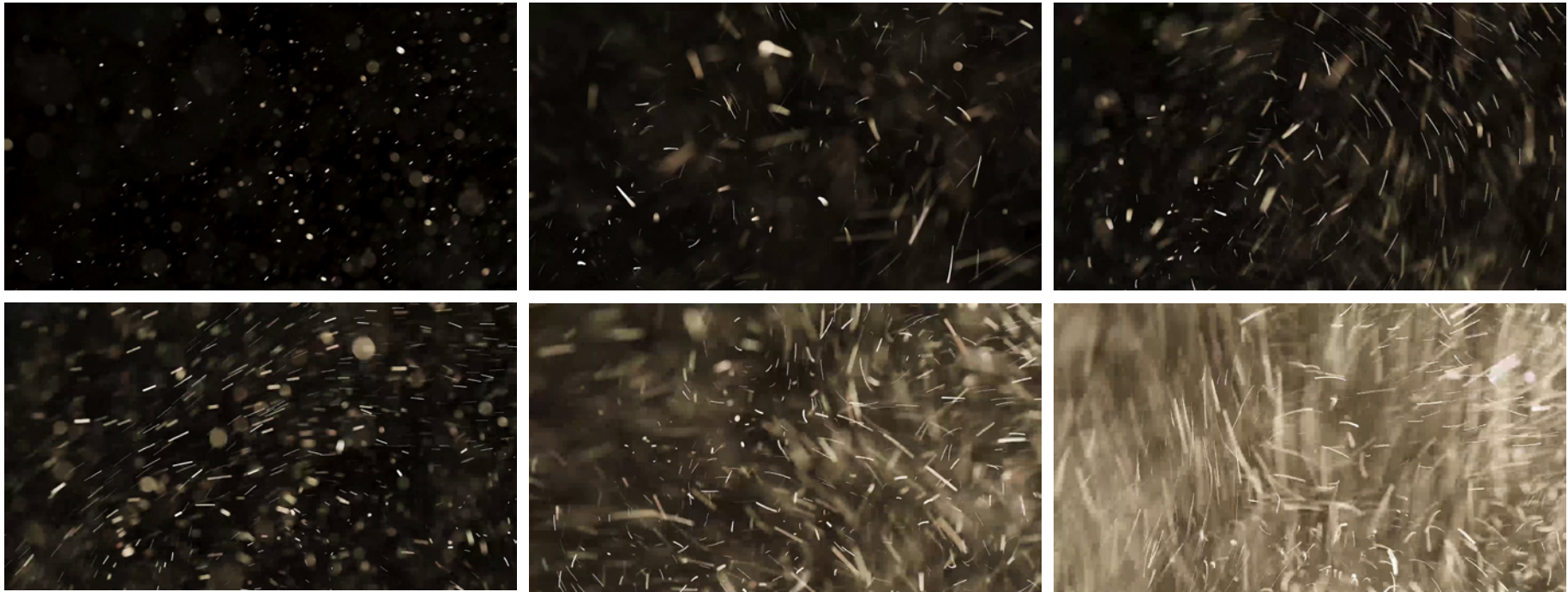
Before I was able to apply black paint to *Chamber's* interior wall surface, it required extensive sanding, followed by additional layers of sanding between each coat of paint. A by-product of this process was a large amount of sawdust fibres and particles that filled the room. My sanding sessions would often span many hours, and beams of late afternoon sunlight would shine through the

studio windows and into *Chamber's* interior. In these sun beams, the thick haze of floating dust particles revealed the turbulent effect that the activity of sanding had on the environment. *Chamber's* enclosed interior had an insulating effect that created a closed air current system. As a result, the sawdust was animated primarily by my body's physical movements within the space. The greater the movement I made, the greater its effect rippled through the space, generating a curious abstraction of my effort and labour. The movements of these floating sawdust particles were recorded and translated in the form of *Particle*, 2023.

Particle is a video installation depicting a multitude of brownish white particles moving in and out of a circular frame. The image is accompanied by audio playback of my particularly systematic approach to sanding *Chamber's* assembled interior wall, one panel at a time. It consists of relatively slow and steady swipes across the panel's surface. The particles' movements vary widely; sometimes they are cohesive, conveying a sense of unity and flow, while at other times they branch off in opposing directions. There are moments where they float gently within the frame as if suspended in fluid, while at others they rapidly cascade at dizzying speeds. After each panel has been sanded, the surface is dusted

with a cloth. The cloth is audibly whipped to remove excess dust, which sometimes causes the entire system of particles to shift in unison. This is followed by a delayed rush of rolling spirals and frenetic disorder. A metal frame chair was used to reach the higher areas of the 2.4m high wall. It can be heard through the distinctive sounds it makes when my shoes step on and off of it, and through the abrupt sound of it being dragged across the floor as I progress from one column to the next.

The repeating sequence of sanding, dusting, whipping and dragging continues for the entirety of the video, interrupted by the occasional cough or sneeze.



Particle, 2023.
Video Projection. Film Stills.



Process Documentation.
Installation testing for *Particle*, 2023 in Michaelis Main Gallery.



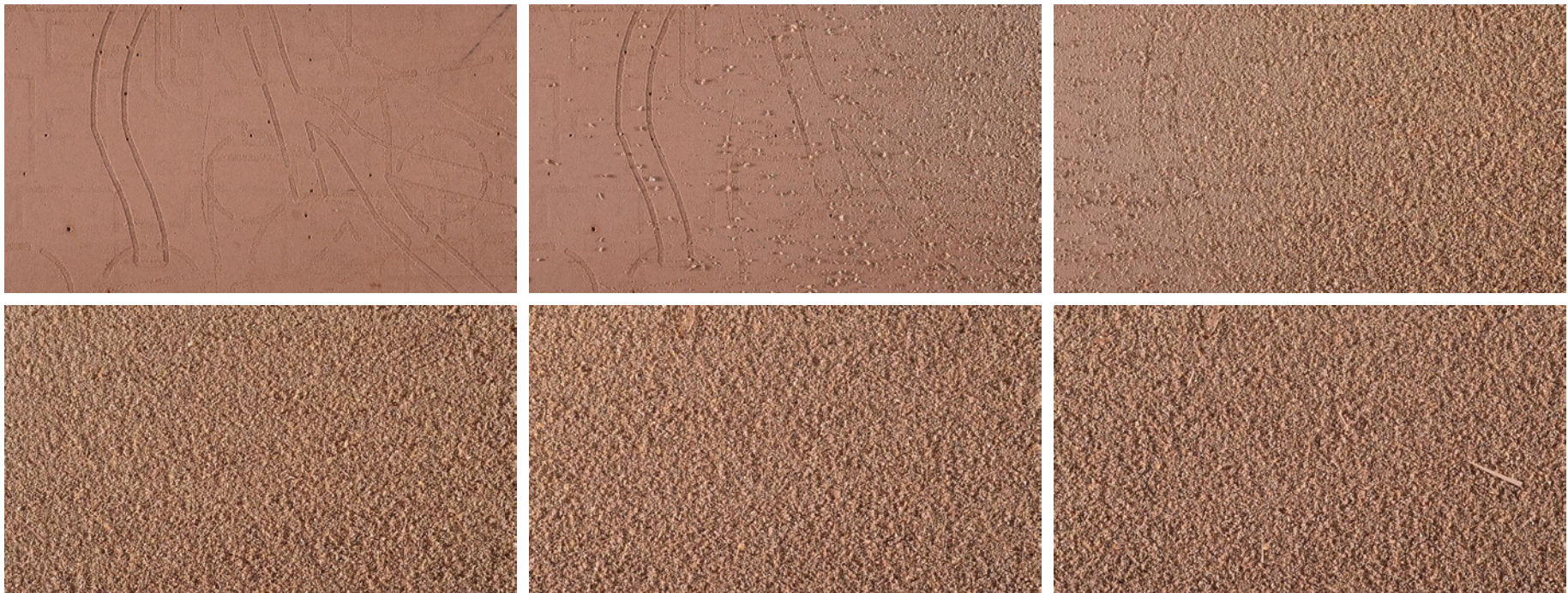
Process Documentation.
Installation testing for *Particle*, 2023 in Michaelis Upper Gallery.

Noise

Similar themes are explored in *Noise*, 2023, a video installation depicting footage of *Chamber's* industrial manufacturing that took place in Michaelis' Digital Fabrication Workshop. The installation includes a large-scale projection of scattering woodchips that fills the width of a gallery wall, accompanied by the piercing sounds of an industrial cutting machine permeating an otherwise empty exhibition space.

The video opens on a flat, light-brown surface with a gentle but audible background hum. The hum is quickly replaced by the sound of an industrial machine powering up and commencing its operation out-of-frame. The operation is portrayed through the sound of the machine's movements, coupled with

an abrasive high-pitched tone that fills the exhibition space. The sound maintains a high register, but shifts in pitch and intensity which at times create smooth, steady gradients, while at others create fast, jarring jumps. The sounds are accompanied by periodic streams of small woodchips and dust particles that spray into view from the top edge of the frame. The woodchips quickly pile up, smothering the surface in a grainy, monochromatic blanket that casts a pale yellow hue through the exhibition space. The woodchip streams gradually progress from the right-side of the frame to the left-side until the machine completes its cutting operation and powers down, slowly returning to a gentle background hum.

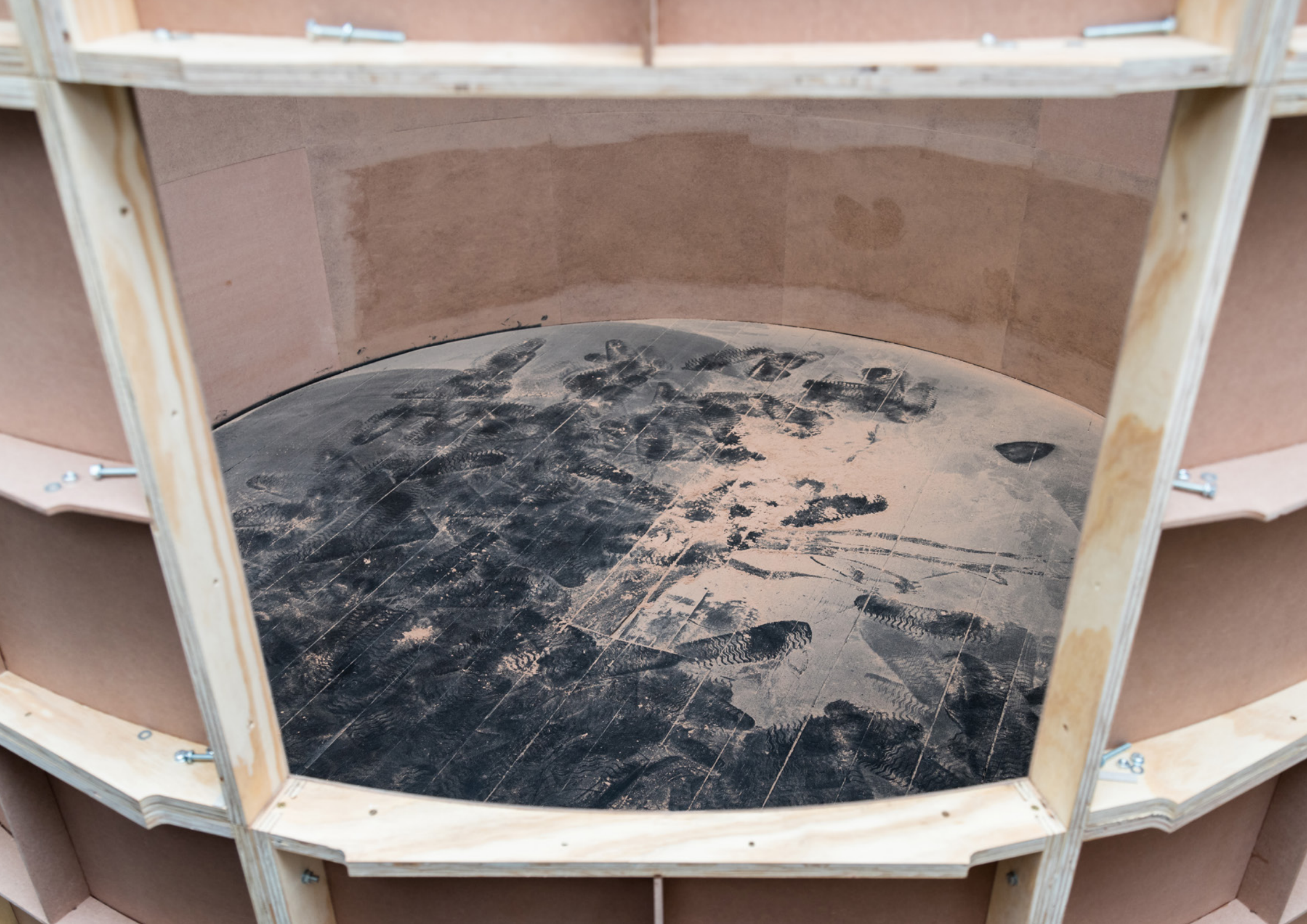


Noise, 2023.
Video Installation. Film Stills.



Both *Noise* and *Particle* provide close observations of plywood being machined and MDF being sanded - specific procedures undertaken to achieve *Chamber's* a priori purpose. This represents a shift in focus from *Chamber* as an end-form to the by-products generated through its making. The shift is quite dramatic when considered in formal terms. When *Chamber* is assembled, the plywood and MDF contribute to a general sense of rigid structure and uniform order. By contrast, *Noise* and *Particle* present these materials as miniscule fragments that are largely unfixed and continuously moving. This shift resonates with the work of Dominique Edwards discussed earlier, where *Keep* presents the cotton as whole sheets of paper lying in a state of rest while *Waking* articulates it as fragmented fibres in a perpetual cycle of rising and falling. However, these formal relationships allude to

my broader recursive methodology in which a largely deliberate, pre-determined, a priori approach to making *Chamber* generates unexpected encounters with the tools and materials being used which offer alternative avenues of exploration that may lead to a more nuanced understanding of what they are and how we relate to them. One could argue that, as discreet artworks, *Noise* and *Particle* might also be loosely understood as 'by-products' in so far as they emerged out of the production of a more definitive end-product. However, as both Edwards' *Waking* and Allen's *Studio* demonstrate, the act of presenting evidence of creative production as art is itself a deliberate act of thoughtful translation. In the same way, *Noise* and *Particle* reframes process in a very specific way, and would to an extent be undercut by the incidental nature with which the idea of the 'by-product' is generally associated.



Floor Lift

A milestone moment in *Chamber's* physical production was demarcating the area of studio space that the structure would contain. Instead of fabricating a new floor, black enamel paint was applied directly onto a circular area of the existing floor surface, covering all colour and tonal detail. One coat of paint was enough to significantly subdue its visual appearance. However, sanding *Chamber's* wall produced an excessive amount of MDF sawdust that began to undermine my efforts. The particles gathered between the wooden floorboards and in all their dents and crevices. It created subtle halos around the raised areas of covered paint droplets. It even emphasized the grain

of the wooden floorboards that were mostly hidden underneath the layer of black paint. My footsteps compacted the particles into their crevices, yet the occasional need to sweep would unsettle the particles and cast them about the surface. In effect, the sawdust revealed some of the floor's fine visual details which I had attempted to cover with paint. In addition, the unfixed, shifting behaviour of the sawdust resisted *Chamber's* purpose of subduing continuous change. The tension between my attempt at stabilising *Chamber's* floor and the various ways that it emerged as an unstable site are explored in *Floor Lift*, 2023.

Floor Lift was created by coating *Chamber's* sawdust-covered floor with cold glue, waiting for it to dry, and peeling the bonded layer from the floor surface. The result is a semi-flexible, partially translucent sheet of glue that is suspended in the air, forming an irregular topography that bends, contorts and folds over itself. One side of the sheet has an ultra-smooth, glossy surface finish that reflects some of the light illuminating it. The other side is roughly textured and covered with highly fragmented traces of the various materials that made up what was previously the floor surface of *Chamber*.

The most prominent materials are the

MDF sawdust, areas of the black paint layer that coated the studio floor surface, and the thick lines of dirt pulled from between the wooden floorboards, parallel with one another and evenly distributed. Less widespread are the flakes and spatters of paint and other residual matter from previous studio occupants, along with splinters of wood from the floorboards themselves. In addition to its material composition, the sheet retains the fine three-dimensional qualities of the floor. These include the notable indentations made by large blobs of paint that did not adhere to the surface, all the way down to the miniscule variations of texture in the floorboards' wood grain.



Floor Lift, 2023.
Wood Glue, Polyurethane paint, Studio floor matter.







Process Documentation.

A stream of diluted cold glue, breaking the boundary of *Chamber's* delimited area and flowing down a path worn down by decades of footsteps.

Floor Lift shares a number of visual and conceptual similarities with Siemon Allen's *Studio* discussed in the previous chapter. However, the differences in how the works translate the studio floor into artworks presented in galleries reveal key divergences. Allen's systematic scanning procedure and intricately detailed image evoke the high degree of control that he maintains over his process, while the art object's medium and its raised status suggest that it will deteriorate a lot slower than the actual studio floor surface. By using cold glue as its substrate, *Floor Lift* is more directly concerned with engaging the floor in material terms.

In this way, the work resonates with Penny Siopis' method of 'painting blind', in which wood glue is used to limit her ability

to determine the visual composition of the finished work. Despite the substantial degree of physical involvement she contributes to the process, it is the properties of glue and how it mixes with other substances on a canvas ground that dictates the final forms of the work. In my own process, the cold glue was applied directly to the floor, penetrating through its layers at varying depths. Consequently, lifting the dry substrate fragmented the ground surface in a manner that had little to do with the dexterity of my hand or the sensitivity of my eye. The rich textures and visual details are primarily the result of the contingent interaction between the physical properties of glue and that of the sawdust, paint, wood and dirt that make up the ground's surface.

A key distinction between Siopis' works

and *Floor Lift* is in the final forms they assume. Siopis' paintings dry to a relatively fixed, stable form on their canvas surface in a way that belies her predominantly fluid process. By contrast, *Floor Lift's* contorted form and fragmented, brittle surface are direct reflections of the unpredictable aspects of its making. I imagine this will become a rather difficult work to preserve. To this extent, it more closely recalls works of process art that pointedly subverted the notion of the well-built object. Ultimately, *Floor Lift* can be thought of as a reversal of the initial act of covering the visual details of my studio, not only in the fact that it partially peels off the black paint, but also because it resulted in a work of instability, in contrast to *Chamber's* end-purpose of establishing stability.

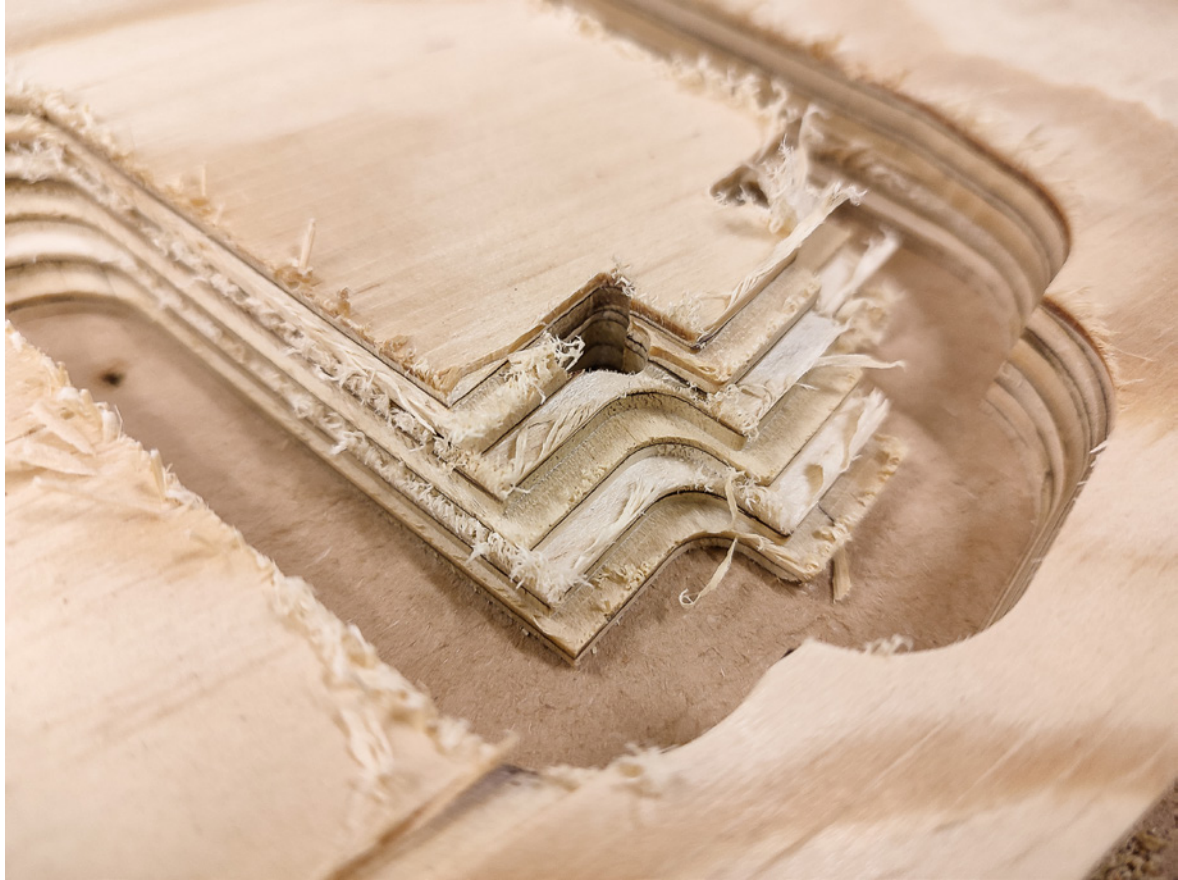


Penny Siopis. *Restless Republic: Spill I*, 2017
Glue and ink on canvas, found object .

Process Documentation
Studio floor after *Floor Lift* was peeled.







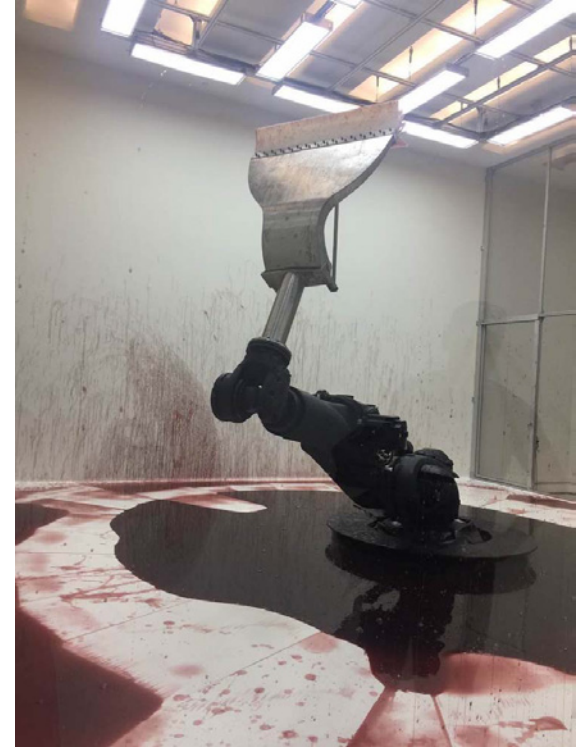
Process Documentation.
Results of router malfunction.

Fixed Errors

Throughout this project I have tended to utilize systematic, procedural methods of thinking and making. This is suggested by the consistent repetitions in *Chamber's* structural forms and the steady sounds of automated machine production in *Noise*. Both of these elements allude to my use of computer-aided design and manufacturing techniques. These are largely a priori methods of production in which computer-controlled machines execute pre-programmed sets of instructions. These tools provided a complex but effective way of fabricating parts with mathematical precision at production speeds I would not be able to achieve by hand. For all their speed and precision, however, these systems are not invulnerable to malfunction.

While cutting plywood parts for *Chamber's* panel structure using a computer-controlled router, I encountered a mechanical problem that caused the router to repeatedly drift by 4mm. It would do this once for each layer it cut, resulting in a stepping pattern being embedded in the completed final form. These parts were functionally unusable for assembling *Chamber*.

It is interesting to note that the router's malfunction did not bring it to a sudden crashing halt. Rather, it continued to systematically execute the instructions with which it was programmed¹⁸. In response to this, I decided to allow the router to continue to execute its pre-defined instruction set without interruption¹⁹.



Process Documentation
Studio floor after *Floor Lift* was peeled.

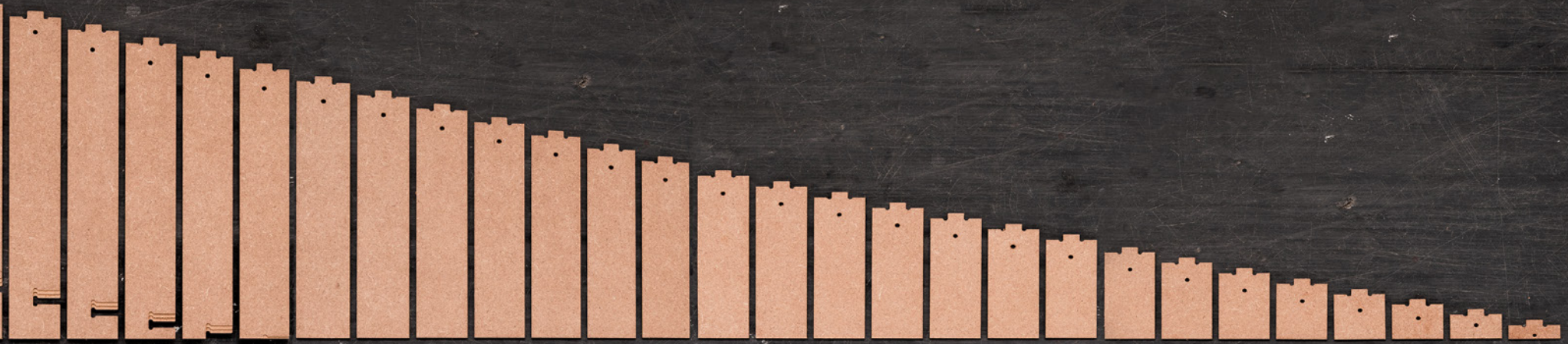
18. This is an explicit aspect of Sun Yuan and Peng Yu's *Can't Help Myself*, 2016. The work is a kinetic installation in which an industrial robotic arm performing repetitive tasks slowly succumbs to mechanical failure. The robot does not abruptly stop working amidst spectacular electrical fires or bellowing smoke. Instead, it performs its pre-programmed task while revealing the limitations it inherits from its material condition and its vulnerability to decay and exhaustion.

19. This decision recalls Penny Siopis' painting method involving stepping back and becoming a spectator to your own process, as suggested by Okeke-Agulu earlier. However, in addition to spectating the router's malfunctioning procedure, I have also translated the visual experience of my process in *Noise*.



Process Documentation.

The result of allowing the router to cut a batch of MDF uprights while in a state of malfunction. The parts are placed on the ground in a position that reflects the router's gradual 4mm drift along its y-axis, as well as how the cutting path began to project off the edge of the MDF board.





Carl Andre. *Pyramid (Square Plan)*, 1959.
74 fir wood planks.

20. Carl Andre's *Pyramid (Square Plan)*, 1959, is an early example of procedural language used in Minimal art. The work is an assembly of 74 fir wood planks of seemingly identical dimensions, stacked in 19 tiers. At the bottom of the stack is a tier of four planks that are laying on their edge grain – or 'side' – and lap joined at their ends to form a square. The tier above it follows a similar form, but each of the four planks are shifted toward the centre of the square by a distance of $\frac{3}{4}$ of the thickness of a plank. This creates a square in which adjacent planks intersect one another. The same shifting function is applied to each subsequent tier creating an arithmetic progression, a type of sequence in which "succeeding terms are derived by the addition of a constant number (2, 4, 6, 8, 10)." (Bochner, 1967:31)

With each layer the router drifted by 4mm, and since I was cutting multiple parts out of a large sheets of plywood, the drift would accumulate. The first few parts displayed the 4mm stepping effect until the router drifted outside the edge of the material. From there, the parts continued to be clipped shorter and shorter until the router had drifted entirely outside the edge of the board. Intriguingly, the stepping effect and the steady progression to completion are more evocative of the procedural language²⁰ of the router than correctly cut parts are.

Jennifer Gabrys articulates this idea and extends it significantly by suggesting that technological failure is in fact an essential component of innovation. In her essay *Machines Fall Apart*, Gabrys (2005:10) states, "If a system is to reveal its critical

operations, it must fail. Technological failure is central to the logic of innovation; it exhibits the scope of the machine's profuse promises unfulfilled, while generating new assurances against a landscape of side effects." Thus, in its failure, the machine reveals its various limitations, and in doing so it offers unexpected side-effects which open up new avenues for innovation. I hesitate to use the term 'failure' to describe my particular encounter with the router. It is a broad term that, in the context of mechanics and technology, might connote total breakdown. I prefer the term 'malfunction' which, though it is synonymous, speaks more closely to the tension between our expectations of technology and those occasions when they do not perform as intended. This line of inquiry lead to *Fixed Errors*, 2023.

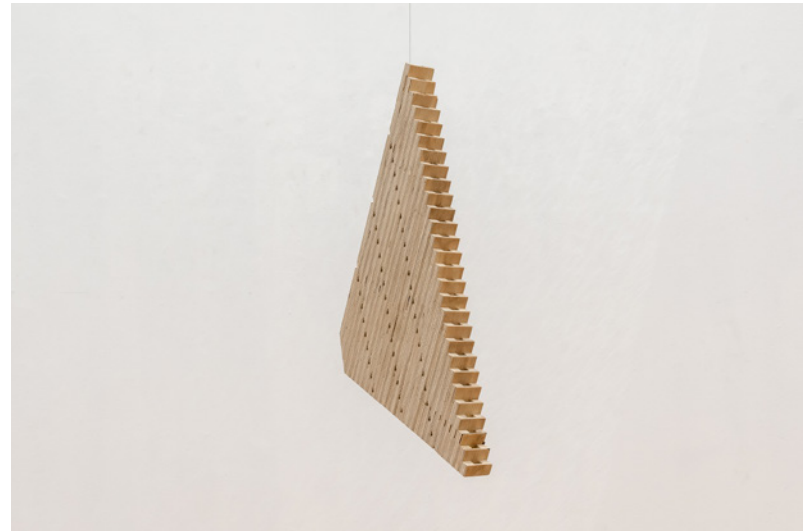
Fixed Errors I and *II* are two sculptural works that represent a rigidly procedural and programmatic system in a state of malfunctioning operation. Each sculpture is a whole object assembled from a base form that is repeated and stacked in a rigidly aligned, systematically progressive sequence of layers. The base form is derived from the plywood and MDF parts used to construct *Chamber*. The arrangement of the layers has a progressive sequential structure in which the position of each successive layer is offset from the preceding layer in equal intervals. The movement of the shifting sequence is limited by a flat face that clips the sequence's progression, thus creating a depreciating form that steadily whittles down to nothing. The cuts are fixed together with cold glue that in *Fixed Errors I* seeps out from between the layers in inconsistent beads and blobs. The sculptures

are suspended in the air at oblique angles in relation to the exhibition space's floor and walls.

For me, the act of 'fixing' the errors by gluing the pieces of wood together in the progression produced by the malfunction represents a definitive act of co-opting the malfunction into my work. While this does cause the work to embody notions of indeterminacy, this is rendered largely invisible by the overwhelming sense of rigidly ordered structure the work has, and only being alluded to in the artwork's title. This can be thought of as a refusal of Pincus-Witten's assertion of Process art that the details of the artist's procedure is made visible in the work, which is the entry point through which artistic value is conveyed in "the spectator's intellectual re-creation of the actions used by the artist to realize the work in the first place." (Pincus-Witten, 1977:16)

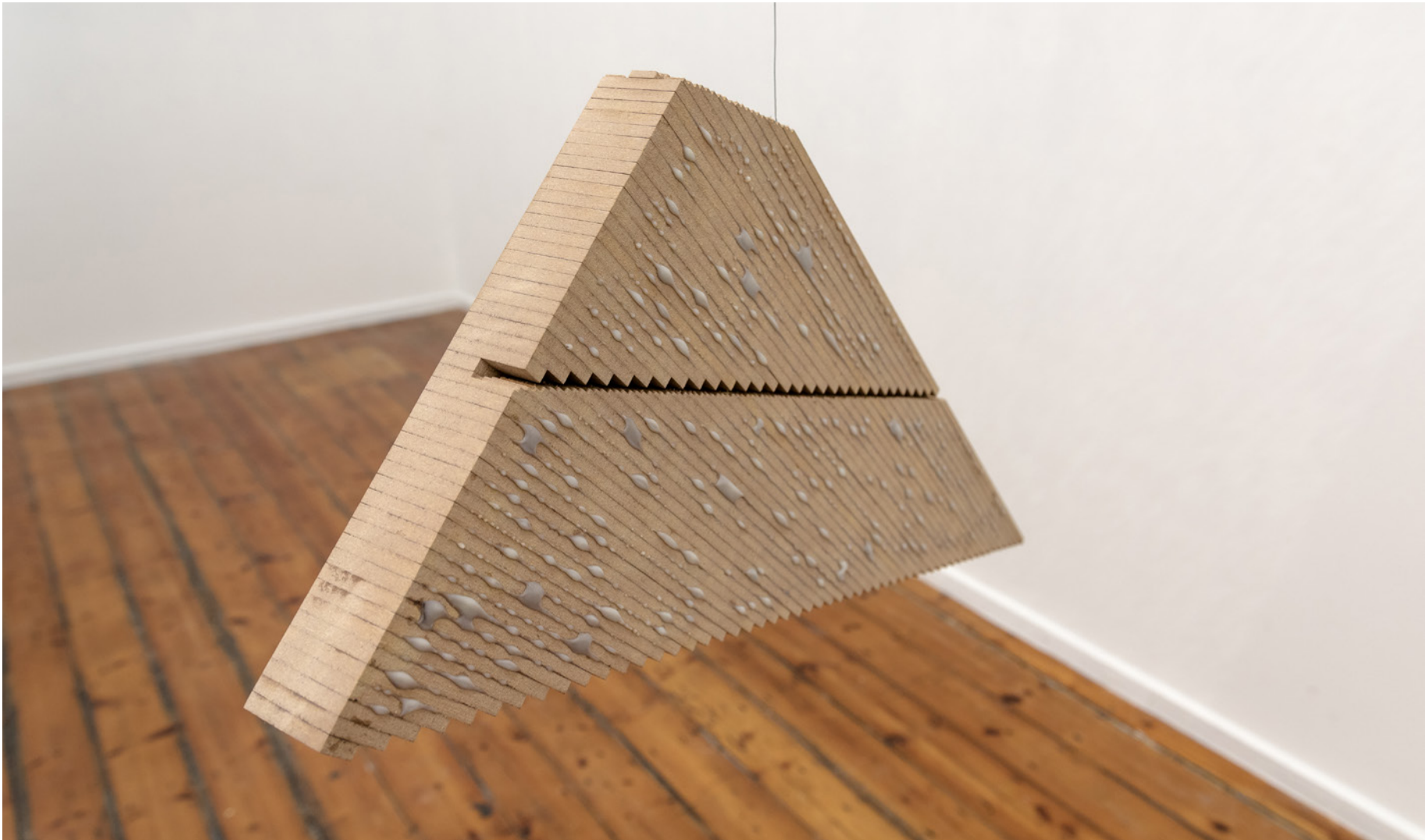


Fixed Errors I, 2023.
MDF, Wood glue.



Fixed Errors II, 2023.
Plywood, Wood glue.





Fixed Errors I, 2023.
MDF, Wood glue.



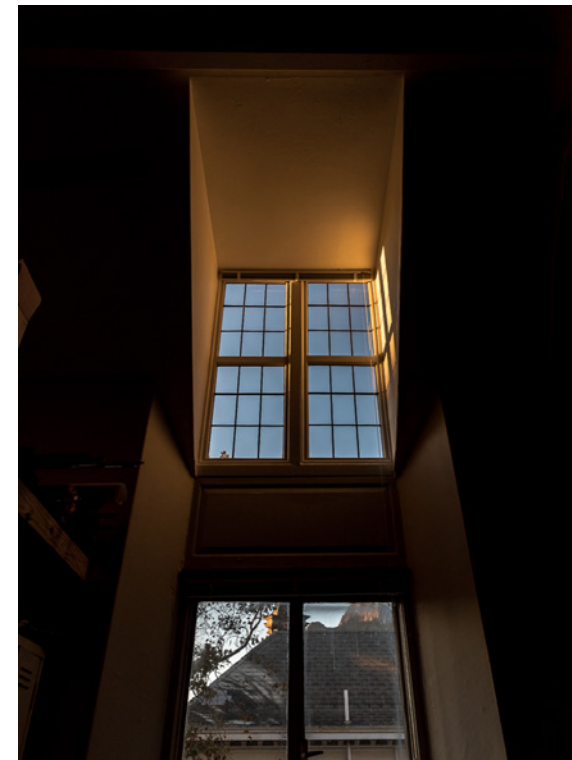
Fixed Errors II, 2023.
Plywood, Wood glue.

Light Leak

A critical part of *Chamber's* purpose as an enclosed, light-tight structure was to regulate the amount of uncertainty and change that might distract me from my open-ended experiments with light. Yet, throughout its production, change and flux have continued to feature, and I have used these encounters as starting points for new works described in this section. The last instance of this is *Light Leak*, 2023.

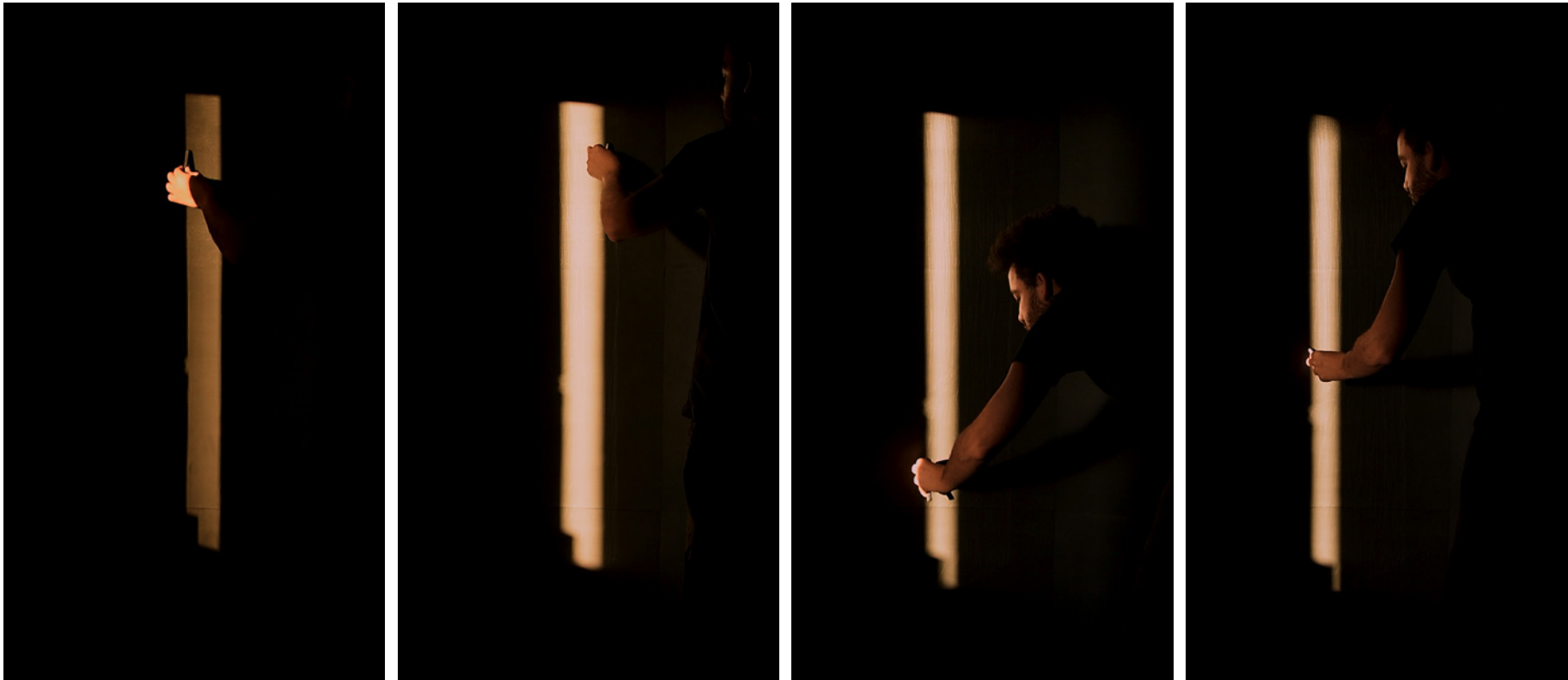
Light Leak is a series of two video works that depict myself performing the procedure

of tracing the outline of a travelling spot of sunlight using a graphite stick. Both videos begin with the pitch-black darkness of *Chamber's* interior. The void is soon interrupted by a spot of direct sunlight passing through the building window and the open gaps in *Chamber's* partially assembled structure. The sunspot proceeds to travel steadily across the surface, slowly morphing in shape as the sun's angle changes. During this time, I perform the repetitive, mechanical act of tracing an outline around the spot of light.

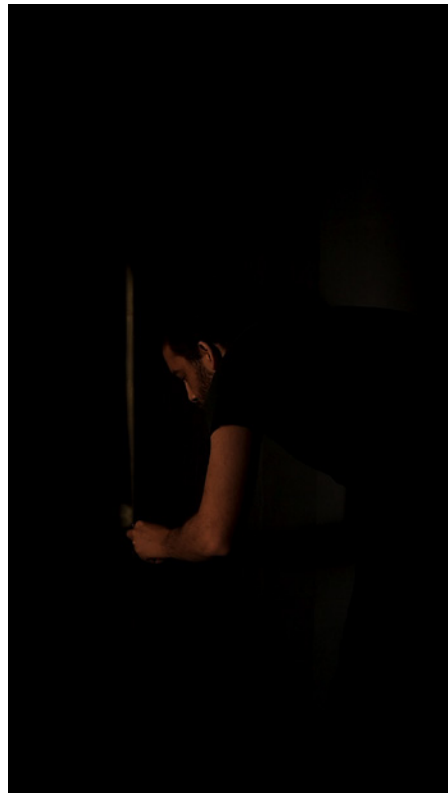
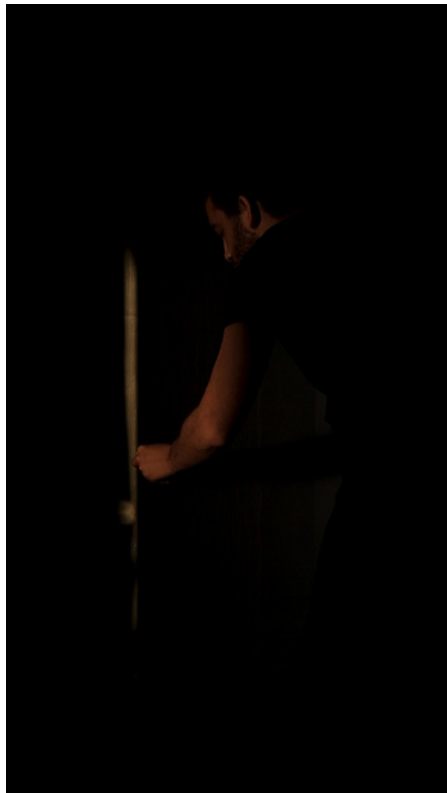
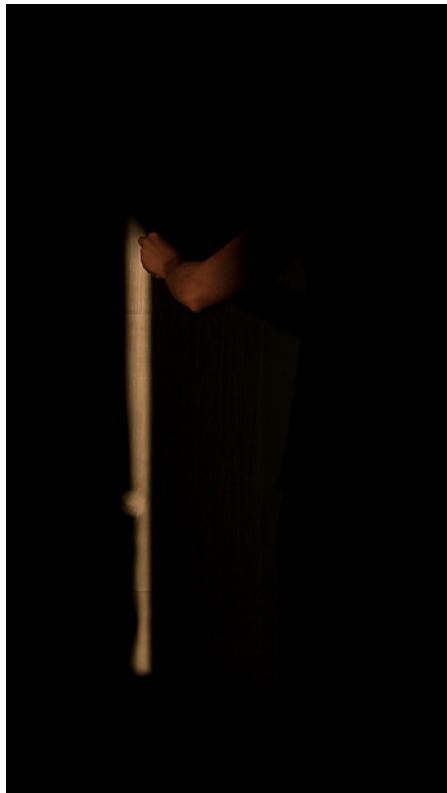
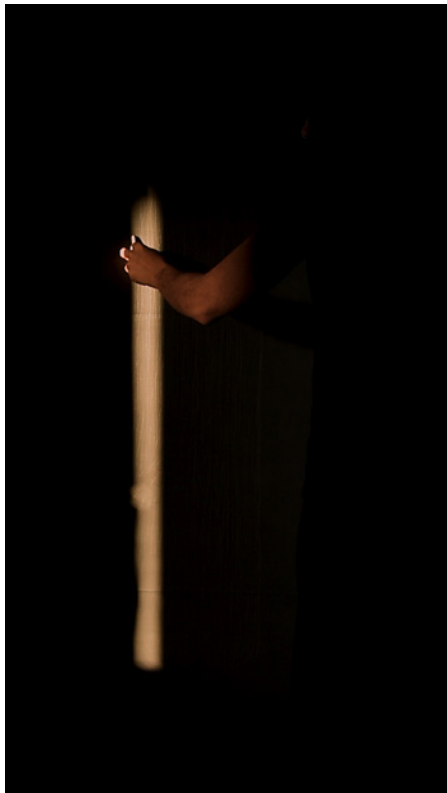


Studio Documentation.
Morning sun rays entering studio

(Left page) Studio Documentation.
Morning sun rays on *Chamber's* interior wall surface.

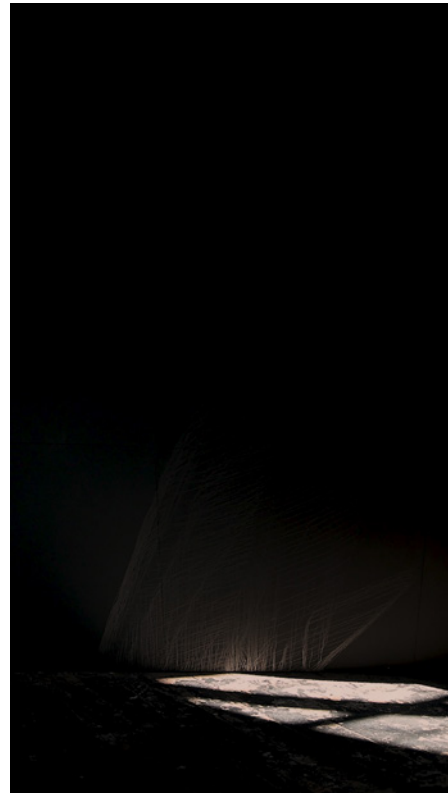
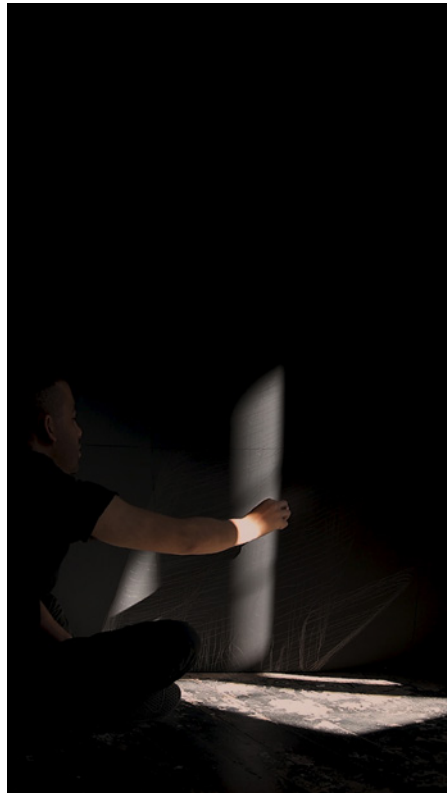


Light Leak I, 2023.
Film Stills





Light Leak II, 2023.
Film Stills





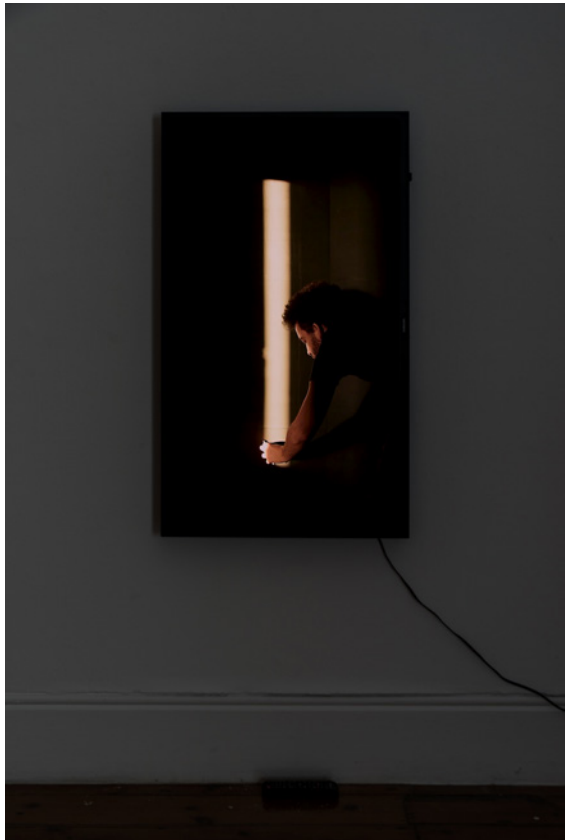
John Gerrard.
Sun Spot Drawing (Guantanamo City), 2012.
Computer simulation.

21. These works share a number of resonances with John Gerrard's *Sun Spot Drawing (Guantanamo City)*, 2012, a computer simulation depicting the shadow of Gerrard's hand holding a magnifying glass that concentrates rays of sunlight into a single spot on a reproduction of a road in Guantánamo, Cuba. The simulation unfolds over a full solar year. At sunrise each day, the virtual model of the artist's hand picks the lens up off the ground and holds it perfectly still. As the day progresses, the sun spot changes shape in response to the shifting angle at which the light rays pass through the lens. At dusk, the hand places the floor back on the ground. (Gerrard, 2012a, Gerrard, 2012b)

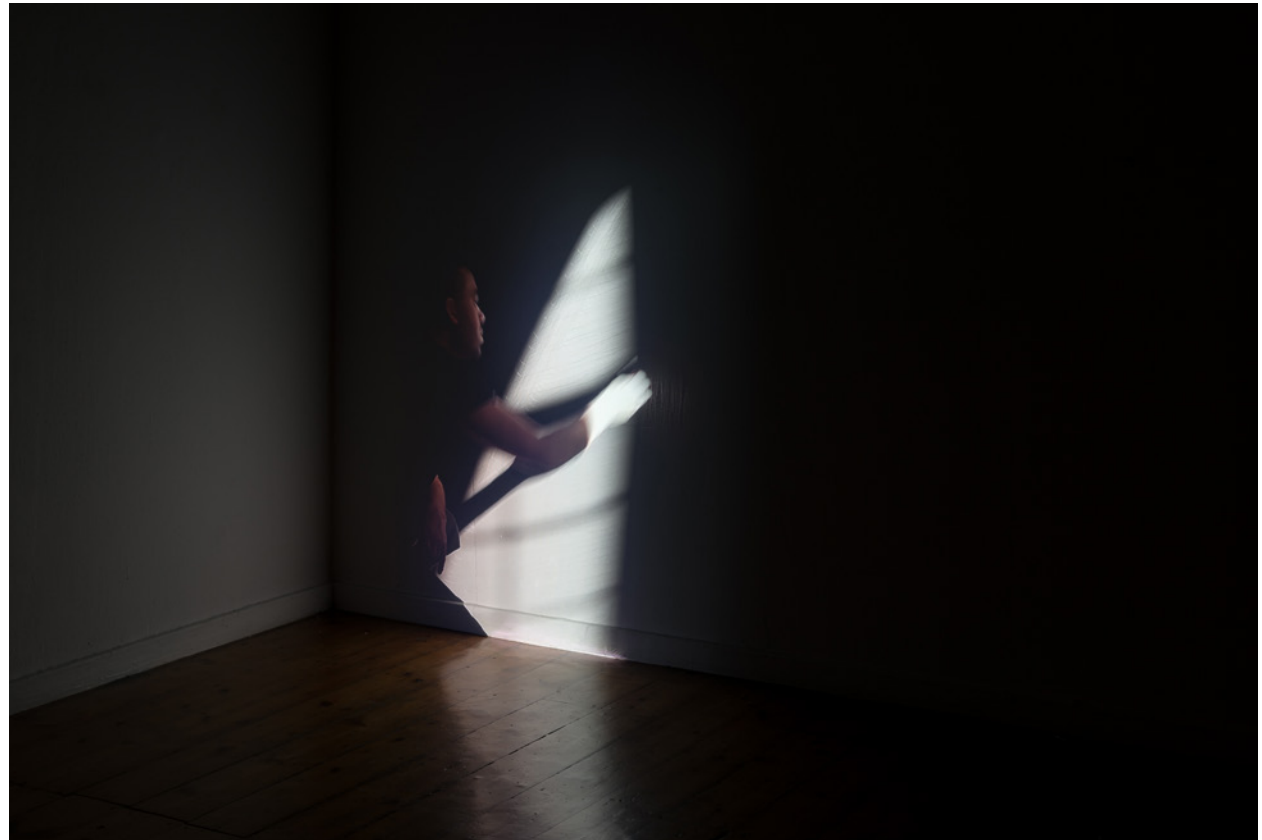
The procedure for *Light Leak I* began at sunrise on Monday 16 May 2022. The area of light appears as a long vertical strip entering *Chamber* through its open door. It moves in a horizontal direction for a short distance while my body repeatedly bends and straightens as my outline spans its full height. The work is displayed on a vertically oriented flat screen TV.

Light Leak II was performed as early morning sun filtered through the upper windows of my studio on Wednesday 21 December 2022. Entering *Chamber* through its uncovered ceiling, the sun light first appears as a small triangle which grows and morphs

dramatically over the course of the video. It travels in a downward, slightly inclined direction, eventually crossing the edge where wall surface meets the floor. Although it begins as one spot, it breaks up into three distinct shapes as the shadows of the window frame emerge. In response, my outline alternates between the three spots. Once the last sliver of light has crossed over to the floor, the drawing procedure stops and the video continues to portray the light's movement along *Chamber's* floor. The video is projected life-size against the wall such that the edge where *Chamber's* wall and floor meet is aligned to that of the gallery, resulting in the sunspot travelling along the gallery floor²¹.



Light Leak I, 2023.
Video



Light Leak II, 2023.
Video projection

Light Leak resonates with a number of key themes raised in this section. Siopis' attention to and interaction with her materials is related to her particular interest in handing control over to her materials, gravity and the canvas complete the work. And while *Particle, Noise*, and – to a lesser extent – *Floor Lift* and *Fixed Errors* reflect this idea, *Light Leak* demonstrates the opposite by taking a step closer and devoting my full attention to a moment of slow, steady change. With this in mind, I think of Edwards' *Waking* and Allen's *Studio*. In both works, the act of coming closer to something and paying attention to its subtle nuances and changes is an act of critical reflection on what the thing is beyond our pre-established conceptions of it. For Edwards, the process of transforming her mother's garments into pulp and presenting it

in a state of fragmentation and flux opens the work up to more complex notions of death and mourning. For Allen, the act of translating the residue and detritus of his studio floor into an exhibited artwork involved certain shifts in scale and proximity that elevated these incidental aspects of creative production beyond the value they are usually ascribed.

In a similar way, sunspots are a phenomenon often overlooked, yet I find them delightfully enigmatic. They are made up of particles too small for the human eye to discern, and moving too fast to track. Thus they appear intangible, yet they trace an incredibly complex system of cosmic proportion without which the eye would not exist. In this way, *Light Leak* is a gesture that invites the viewer to consider the complex dynamics at work in how they exist in and perceive of the world.



Studio Documentation.
Morning sun peaking through a window in my 2nd year studio.

Conclusion

In this section I have discussed a number of my artworks, elaborating on the extent to which they are responses to specific encounters with materials, tools and my studio environment during the physical production of *Chamber*.

These encounters included the transformation of *Chamber's* rigid materials into unfixed particulate matter in states of ongoing change; the persistent sense of uncertainty evoked by my studio environment despite my efforts to subdue it; an industrial machine revealing the systematic, procedural nature of its operations even as it malfunctions; and the ongoing presence of sunlight in *Chamber*, despite its function of being enclosed and light-tight.

The tensions between these encounters and *Chambers'* pre-conceived purpose of establishing a sense of visual control and consistency offered alternative avenues for creative engagement. Through these avenues I was able to explore certain concerns regarding artistic process discussed in relation to art historical discourse and contemporary art practice. Of central concern was the relationship between creative practice as an end in itself as opposed to a means to an end.

As I argued earlier, *Chamber* was the end-product that provided an extensive, multifaceted production process facilitating ongoing physical interaction with materials, tools and environments out of which the

works discussed in this section emerged. I discussed this through *Noise* and *Particle*, which portray process residue in a state of fragmentation and flux, generated through the act of cutting and sanding plywood and MDF to achieve *Chamber's* completed form. This raises the notion of the by-product, not only through the representation of plywood chips and MDF sawdust generated through manufacturing, but also in the idea that these video installations are discreet, self-contained artworks that nevertheless emerged out of the process of making a different artwork. This idea can be extended to *Fixed Errors* and *Floor Lift*. Their portrayal of incorrectly cut panel parts and the transferred surface of my studio

are also technically 'by-products', as they are the unanticipated results of *Chamber's* production. However, such a dualistic product vs. by-product dynamic would undercut the various shifts and tensions in how plywood and MDF are presented across the body of work. The same can be said of other materials like wood glue and black paint, as well as the specific forms with which *Chamber* was designed. The artworks discussed in this section were not presented as is, but thoughtfully rearticulated in light of *Chamber*.

Another notable subject discussed in this section has been the constantly shifting dynamic between the artist's deliberate, controlled actions and elements

of contingency that result from the indeterminate conditions of the materials, forces and environments in art making. The inherent indeterminacy of art making is most clearly evoked in *Floor Lift*. Its contorted form and fragmented, brittle surface speaks to the uncontrolled, unpredictable aspects of its making. More broadly, *Chamber* was initially crafted to establish a sense of order for my experimentation, yet, in its production I was confronted by the persistent indeterminacy that continuously resisted those attempts. These elements of contingency emerged through the unpredictable tendencies of materials during uncontrolled interactions, which are reflected in the indiscriminate scattering of plywood chips in *Noise*, the turbulent flow of sawdust particles in *Particle*, and the fragmented, unstable forms of *Floor Lift*. These elements starkly contrast the notable sense of rigid structure or uniform order evident throughout the larger body of work. This is not to say that

contingency is somehow antithetical to uniformity. *Fixed Errors* demonstrates how distinctly systematic, procedural systems are themselves subject to the contingent interrelationships of their individual parts. If one part malfunctions and the remainder of the system continues to operate, the result becomes a co-operation of both its procedural operations and the fragility of its material properties.

Together, the individual artworks in my body of work form a web of interrelated parts in which *Chamber* lies at the centre. A specific set of materials and forms tie the works together, yet it is the transformations between the artworks that begin to speak to how *Chamber* came to be. In this way, while the exhibition as a whole can be considered a body of creative results or outputs of the research project, it is also a critical exploration of a recursive methodology exploring the inseparable relationship between the artwork as end and the means of its production.



Inconclusion

This project has explored how making art can be a means of reflecting on the inherent indeterminacy of the world and the particular systems humans use to order it.

Embracing the uncertainty and unpredictability of making has been my interest from the projects earliest conception. What I had not anticipated was how personal and introspective such an activity would be. In carrying out this project I have been confronted with my own particular ways of looking and thinking, which has led to radical shifts in my understanding of the foundation of my creative practice and how it might proceed moving forward.

The title *Out of Order* alludes to two fundamental elements of interacting with the materials, objects and environments in the world that I grappled with throughout this project. Firstly, these interactions inevitably involve a degree of unpredictability and uncontrollability that emerges from the inherent indeterminacy of the world. To be *in order*, then, can be understood to refer to *orderliness*, or the expectation that the world adheres to pre-determined sets of rules, parameters or logical systems imposed upon it. *Order* can also be understood as an instruction or direction, where objects or systems can be used as instruments that are utilized *in order to* achieve the desired ends or outcomes toward which

(Left page) Process Documentation.

A view from inside *Chamber* while fully assembled with its door partially open. In this iteration, *Chamber* was assembled in the Michaelis Gallery with gallery lights turned on. In *Chamber's* exhibited presentation the gallery lights are turned off.

they are directed. In both cases, the term *out of order* invokes the tensions that exist between the overarching human tendency to construct frameworks for engaging the world and the tendency for those structures to operate outside of the bounds to which they are prescribed.

In the face of these encounters our assumptions and expectations unravel, and we are confronted with the complexity of the world as both contingent and continuously changing. This leads to the second significance in the term *Out of Order*. If attempting to order our experience of the world reveals its underlying complexity, then such activity can be a generative space for exploring tensions between human systems of order and a world that is largely outside of our control.

In this dissertation I have sought to provide a theoretical foundation for conceiving of creative practice as a method of engaging with these aspects of being in the world. My discussion has focused on situating the tension between deliberate, pre-determined plans and unexpected encounters with materials within the context of

art-historical discourse. This was a key subject of inquiry in Robert Morris' artworks and writings, which conceived of art as a unique means of exploring how the human body exists in, perceives of and relates to a physical world filled with uncertainty and instability. By extending Morris' ideas in relation to the works of Dominique Edwards, Penny Siopis and Siemon Allen, I sought to articulate a recursive approach to art practice in which the relationship between an artwork and the means of its production can be a method of exploring the continuously shifting dynamic between our pre-determined plans and the indeterminacy of process. Following this, my discussion elaborated on my own research which was framed by the construction of *Chamber*, an artwork that sought to establish a visually controlled, unchanging environment using rigid materials and procedural production methods. Throughout this process I repeatedly encountered elements of indeterminacy and contingency that conflict with the end-purpose for which *Chamber* was produced. The tensions that arose through these encounters were used

as entry point into further avenues of inquiry. I elaborated on these details, not out of an interest in accounting for my process, but to offer entry points into the specific complexities that I experienced during my project.

Yet this very act raises a notable discrepancy between what this dissertation seeks to accomplish and what I have explored in my studio practice. Words, discussions and theoretical arguments are themselves a means of constructing and ordering our experience of the world, and they are subject to the same indeterminacy I encountered in my studio. And while this dissertation does not purport to achieve certainty or resolve – hence the title of this section – I have utilized the written word as an instrument for making sense through legible communication.

By contrast, the artworks on exhibition are open-ended objects and prompts for individual experiences, simultaneously evoking rigidity and fracture, fixity and instability, direction and divergence. They are a different form of articulation, embodying tensions between

deliberate acts and chance encounters without the need for legibility. And while their formal elements reflect the themes explicated in the content of this text, I am more interested in offering the viewer a space for thinking about their relationship to the work, and what it is they bring to it. This is reflected in the number of individual works that call the viewer to *be with it*, sharing in its space and in its time. This is most clearly suggested in the final presentation of *Chamber*, a work which was initially conceived as a container for artistic experimentation, but ultimately became a space for contemplating interiority and exteriority, both in terms of the boundaries that delineate physical space, and in the self-constructed boundaries that separate our self-perception from that which we consider external. In my mind, this is perhaps the only ‘end’ that I can conceive for this research project; one in which the works offer the viewer time and space to reflect on what they are experiencing, and how they perceive it. What they take from my work, however, remains out of my control.

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