Director's Foreword
Janine Mileaf

Perhaps the most pernicious aspect of COVID-19 lies in how it restricts care. Contagion demands distance and barriers, causing those infected to live out the course of the disease in isolation, without the therapeutic benefits of touch or companionship. The cruelty of that restriction became palpable to me one morning when my daughter awoke in agony. The cause of her pain turned out to be an internalized infection, treatable with antibiotics, but for a moment, we thought we were confronting COVID. Panic overtook me as I considered our circles of contact, decisions she or I had made to allow the infection, and the inevitable spread to my younger daughter, my husband, and myself. Counter to what I knew to be prudent behavior in that situation, I found myself at her side attempting to give comfort and care at the risk of my own health. The contradiction in that embrace—the more I gave her in one moment, the less I could probably give in the long-term—clarified the incongruity of caregiving that had been circling in my mind since we began work on this exhibition, long before we could imagine ourselves in the midst of a pandemic at its debut.

The initial interest in the thematics raised by *Upkeep: Everyday Strategies of Care* grew out of the invitation to consider the meanings of contemporary feminisms prompted by the Feminist Art Coalition, a national initiative that seeks to "generate cultural awareness of feminist thought, experience, and action." Recognizing that gender itself is happily in a state of flux, we wondered

how to approach "feminism" with an unfixed sense of "fem." In this aspect, important prior work had been done to direct our attention away from identity per se and toward the labor associated with the positionality of the maternal. The scholarship of Maggie Nelson, who has been lecturing on the possibility of an "aesthetics of care" that recognizes its potentially coercive nature, particularly guided our early thinking on the topic.

The notion of care that we explore here thereby exists not in the catastrophic or exceptional signaled by the pandemic, but rather in the ordinary that has moved into the foreground as we occupy our domestic spaces in unprecedented ways. As in the actions of those who maintain the living conditions of their care circle as habit, the artists gathered here attend to the minor activities of upkeep—slight gestures, open questions, repetitive acts, distant memories, intimate approaches, and subtle refusals. Naming, enacting, or pointing toward regular activities that sustain humans and environments, Elliott Jerome Brown, Jr., Lenka Clayton, Sarah Cwynar, Bronwyn Katz, Chancellor Maxwell, and Lily van der Stokker each recognize mundane, yet necessary, labor through an embodied lens.

Caregiving—the conventional domain of mothers, nurses, nannies, sitters, teachers, aids, and daughters—presumes a unidirectional relation in which the "care-er" is depleted in favor of the "care-ee" without proper compensation or recognition. The gendering of this paradigm supposes a feminized actor whose function it is to provide for others. Throughout our selections of artists and artworks, we have tried to

acknowledge the elasticity of gender designations, as well as to recognize that identity does not necessarily align with function. A newer strain of care-speak, prevalent in our particular moment of social unrest and demands for racial equity, turns care onto the self, promising to equalize the relation in a torrent of pampering products, treatments, and regimens. Though aspiring to restore the imbalance of caring through commercial transaction in its most cynical form, properly dispensed self-care may be understood as an invaluable tool for activism. As H. Daly Arnett argues in the accompanying essay, care becomes essential for a society risking systemic change, and at the same time the pursuit of a gratifying "aesthetics of care" remains elusive.

We are grateful for the participating artists who worked with us through the upheaval of this time, and hope, without irony, that they have felt our care.

The exhibition could not have taken place without the generosity of the lenders Pamela Joyner and Fred Giuffrida, and Shelley Fox and Philip Aarons. For their ongoing assistance with all aspects of the exhibition's execution and logistics, we thank Holly Bresnahan, David Merz, Blake Ashby, and Adam Mikos of the Arts Club of Chicago; Jonathan Garnham of Blank Projects, Cape Town; Michael Gillespie of Foxy Production, New York; Amanda Schmitt and Paolo Ripamonti of Kaufmann Repetto, Milan and New York; Nicelle Beauchene and Patrick Bova of Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York; and Leni Velasquez, Fine Arts Registrar of the Joyner Giuffrida collection, San Francisco. Thanks to Aron Gent of Document for producing new prints on a tight schedule, and Hour

Studio for this sensitively conceived brochure. For her collaborative spirit, we are indebted to artist Leslie Baum of Thresholds Bridge South. She introduced us to Chancellor Maxwell and his remarkable mother Konora Maxwell-Mason, both of whom we are enormously appreciative. Thanks again to Maxwell, Lenka Clayton, and Elliott Jerome Brown Jr., for producing newly commissioned work during this emotionally challenging time and in the context of uncertainty. Finally, I must acknowledge my co-curator H. Daly Arnett; she was the driving force behind this project and the person whose questions I relied upon daily to challenge my casual convictions.

Pulling out Hairs from the Drain

H. Daly Arnett

I hope in the afterlife there's none of this stuff.

Maxine Kumin, 1996[1]

There are always dishes. A delicious or acceptably edible meal and then dishes. Hand lotion after the dishes and sometimes phone calls during and even worse but only occasionally an errant fork down the disposal. There are the walks and now tick-checks. Soon again there will be the shoveling and de-icing the sidewalk. There's sunscreen, if less often than there should be. There's worry, concern, laughter, hugging.

There are all these accumulating measures, tasks, routines, and instincts that scaffold *everything else*. These actions are the domain of caring, care-taking, mothering, and self-care. They're a forgettable bunch, lost in their dreary repetition. Yet care is nevertheless the domain of continued interest for contemporary artists working across mediums—perhaps precisely *because* of its simultaneous ubiquity and anonymity. These repetitive gestures, through which we perform upkeep of ourselves and others, illuminate the precarity and fragile pleasures of domestic life alongside possible modes of civic engagement. The artists collected in this exhibition take "care" not as their subject, but rather as an ethic—cautiously but optimistically turning their attention to marginalia and the relations of power that determine their arrangement. They transcribe the intimacy and maintenance work that constitutes the substance of caring in the only ways it matters.

As the pandemic surged globally in the early spring, we learned a new grammar to legislate our behavior with each other. In this new grammar, the value of "caring" seemingly bottomed out. While disbursements were allocated under the auspiciously titled "CARES Act," the federal relief package in the United States, corporations assured us through billboards that "WE CARE." Although the word was omnipresent, the gestures felt shallow as we struggled to reimagine how to express and perform care for those both within and outside of our homes. Even more, the pandemic laid bare the fact that so many of our care-takers, regardless of how often we clapped, were underpaid and working in conditions of utter precarity and significant threat. Further, the simple task of caring for ourselves and others prevails as a political necessity.

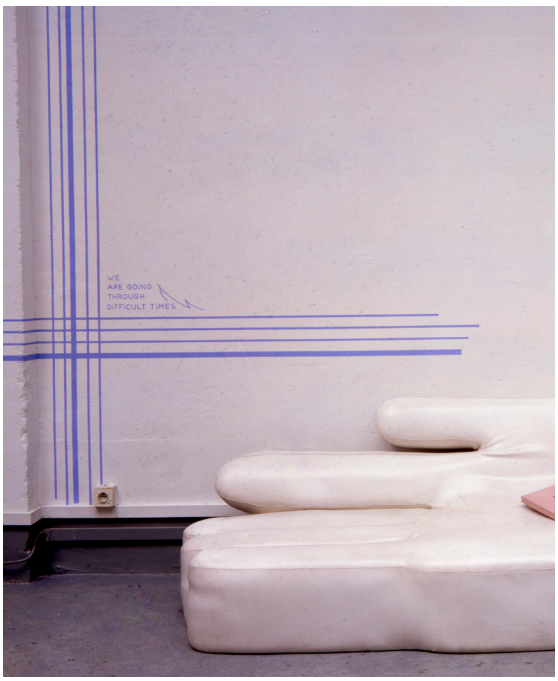


Fig.1
Lily van der Stokker, "We are going through difficult times," 1995. Wall painting, Galerie Jousse Seguin, Paris. No longer extant. Courtesy Galerie Patrick Seguin.

In short, "WE ARE GOING THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES," as whispered by a 1995 wall painting by the Dutch artist Lily van der Stokker (fig. 1). Commissioned for an

1 Maxine Kumin, "Chores," *Poetry Magazine* (June 1996), 151.

exhibition at Galerie Jousse Seguin, Paris, the work was painted over at the close of the exhibition but it echoes as a truism despite its lost original context. Van der Stokker's wall paintings, begun in the mid-1980s, range in style and scale. Whereas this work places the text in the elbow of a blue linear design, others scale to the size of entire rooms, spiralling along the expanse of walls embellished with curlicues and pacifying pastel colors. While critics frequently code van der Stokker's chirping, site-specific painted installations with a "childlike innocence" or "pop femininity," these descriptions belie a more serious dimension of the works. They mutate, through an exuberance of color and fantastical form, the vanitas painting, cataloguing and exalting the refuse of domestic life. The paintings recount to us the futile realities of everyday maintenance: "Pulling out Hairs from the Drain" (page 50–51) or "Toilet Clean in 7 Minutes" are simultaneously hilarious expressions to be articulated by an artwork and a dull reminder of the work left to be done at home.

Van der Stokker has previously referred to her approach as a "non-shouting feminism," which may be understood not as a criticism of approaches in feminist social movements, but rather as in accordance with what some philosophers in the late 20th century branded an "ethics of care." In an attempt to imagine a feminine approach to morality, attending to mutual responsibility and individual vulnerability over personal freedom, psychologist Carol Gilligan endorsed an "ethics of care" as a restorative practice of moral judgment. It is a practice that asks participants, simply, to consider others when they make ethical decisions.[2] Rooted in the virtues of empathy and compassion, it requires a vigilant attention to not only one's interpersonal relationships, but also to their investment in social,

2 Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 62–63.

political, and spiritual communities.[3] As an ethic, it requires continued practice, revision and maintenance. Here, van der Stokker's paintings ground this ethic of care through their insistently quotidian and yet (through that focus) insightful observations. They are a feminist way of seeing the world, attending to operations and objects that are typically out of vaulted sightlines.

There is an element of fantasy in both van der Stokker's paintings and an ethics of care: that by simply paying more attention to and prioritizing the cumulative behaviors and tasks that maintain our mutual existence, we may build a better society. It is a hope best articulated by Black feminists such as Audre Lorde, who acknowledge the revolutionary necessity of self-care as self-determination. This is not self-care as branded by Sephora, but rather as "self-preservation," when the self is under the threat of being obliterated.[4] While it is a critical practice for activists such as organizers within Black Lives Matter, as inherited from Lorde's direction, it is not a revolutionary act—nor a necessary one—to wear a clay face mask or take a bubble bath. Survival is resistance only when extinction is the object of your oppressor. Self-care is marketed as an individual idiom of survival, whereas caring for others takes on survival as a collective endeavor.

Sara Cwynar zeros in on this cynical use of the idiom of self-care in contemporary consumer culture in *Red Film* (pages 12–17, 40–41). Prior to enrolling in a photography program, Cwynar worked as a graphic designer for both commercial brands and media companies. This experience undoubtedly

3 In framing an "ethics of care" as a response to Lawrence Kohlberg's approaches to moral development, Gilligan relied on gendered language and societal conditioning to align this approach to ethics with femininity. Several philosophers, including Joan Tronto, have refuted Gilligan's essentialist leanings in their revisions of an ethics of care. Although it is bound up in an attempt to evaluate "femininity," the "ethics of care" is broadly accepted as a feminist approach to ethics.

4 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Toronto: Crossing Press, 2007), 114–123.

honed her facility with the subtle cues of contemporary visual communications, as evident particularly in the video work from 2018. Made while in residency at the Art Gallery of Ontario, *Red Film* enmeshes images that variously stage sites of production under capitalism: between flashes of masterworks such as Rubens's *Massacre of the Innocents* (pages 12–13), Cwynar's camera tracks blush compacts down a conveyor belt and then across the faces of young women posing and dancing. A droning male voice describes these conditions, borrowing quotes from a bevy of critical theorists, philosophers, and artists. Cwynar's voice increasingly cuts in—once to affirm the speaker's suggestion: "You've got to take your pleasure where you can get it, Sara."

It's a pernicious, if flirtatious, call to action, and one that is uncannily familiar for the contemporary consumer. Pleasure is a vacant promise, stilted by a chorus of increasing desires. Cwynar draws equally on the garish marketing styles of television advertisements and the insidious subtleties of subsidized media throughout the work. Here, *Red Film* circles the double bind of wanting to be an object of desire, while still being desirous of objects—in particular those objects which are marketed to make one, in turn, more of a desirous object. Here, the droning citations point to the construction of a subject through routines of "self-care" and beautification that never quite satisfy. Without determining the consequences of how our desires are manifested through objects, or how authenticity is mediated through images, *Red Film* affirms the ache of investing in objects and images with the hope that they may disclose our nature.

Although these routines of self-preservation feel alienating, Cwynar's composition shows that they are historically contingent, and therefore not binding. It is undeniable that taking care of others, and oneself, takes time. This time is most often cited as a constraint in the perceived contradiction between care and freedom. However, figuring time spent caring as a constraint is a pessimistic—and patriarchal—approach to civility. For some, the obligation to care for others is placed in direct opposition to liberty, self-determination, and fun. In these cases, a binary opposition is drawn: one's freedom *to* determine their existence is now bound up in a freedom *from* any obligation to others, figuring that obligation as a hindrance, as oppression. In short, that by asking a neighbor to consider their community when making individual choices, we are limiting their personal liberty.[5] The figure of the mother may be invoked here, as a caretaker *par excellence* who is perpetually expected to maintain the domestic sphere, historically erased from civic life or personal development beyond the maternal function.[6] Lenka Clayton's "Artist Residency in Motherhood" upends this assertion, framing motherhood as a "valuable site" for artistic production against the romantic notions of the individual artistic genius cultivating work in complete isolation. In the residency, the activities of motherhood—of caretaking—become materials for the artist rather than obstacles to overcome.

What, then, comes from reclaiming the time spent caring for others? Is this time reclaimed in the name of the individual, now free to dispose of it selfishly? Or might reclamation entail other possibilities, by which the time spent caretaking or mothering can be revalued and resignified? A result may be found in Clayton's project "Mothers' Days," 2020 (page 8–9), in which the artist asked nearly a hundred other artist mothers to record every part of their day, over a simultaneous period of 24 hours across the

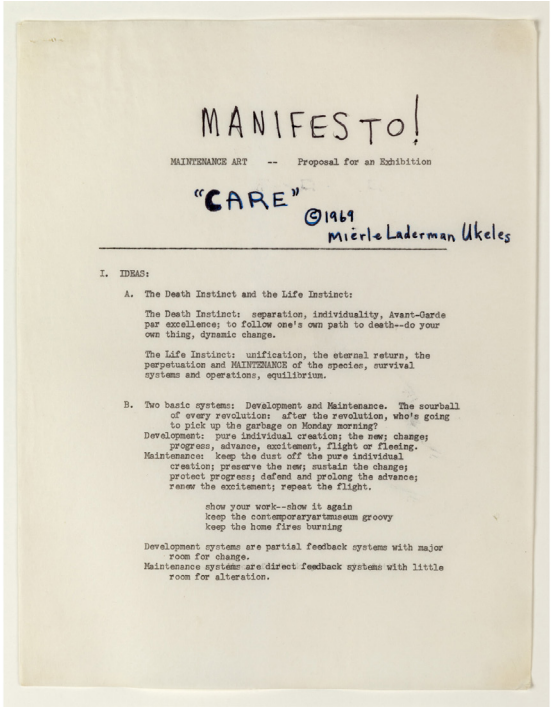
5 In many ways, my attention to when and how we see care in action—and what value we give to it—is inflected by the work of Maggie Nelson. Most notably, she lectured from a forthcoming book at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2018, briefly mentioning the ways in which trying to describe an "aesthetics of care" places an undue burden on works of art, revealing how much we expect from objects and how strangely we project anxieties onto them.

6 Jacqueline Rose, *Mothers: an Essay on Love and Cruelty* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019), 81.

globe. The results are, of course, varied and particular documentations of what is frequently described as a shared and universalized experience. Clayton first printed these diaristic accounts on old construction paper, echoing the sun-drenched saturation of van der Stokker's chosen palette. At the Arts Club, Clayton invites several participants to record readings of their days aloud, voicing the entries. Again, like van der Stokker's paintings, "Mothers' Days (chorus)" appropriates the direct address, amplifying otherwise unspoken (silenced, erased) labors of maintenance and care. The records of their days ebb and flow around recurrent, central activities such as cleaning, discipline, moments of solitude, and humor. Ironically, the ubiquity of these tasks reinforces their relative invisibility within our lives. As each mother recalls the structure of her day, the texts alight the ceaseless choices that are made in order to care for ourselves and others. They read both as exhausting and as remarkably open-ended: we can see through type-written routines that maintenance work does not always foreclose the potential of each day.

The texts are as striking in their rhythmic similarities as they are in their differences. Of course, a monolithic representation of motherhood is not possible, and the variety of accounts collected by Clayton—even from mothers who share a profession and are recording synchronously—are a testament to this. The recurrences in the text then speak more to the fact that "mothering" isn't a naturally given activity that is endowed with certain characteristics, but rather a historically contingent performance of labor within our contemporary social organization. Again, in returning to Jacqueline Rose, there is a latent expectation that these rituals of maintenance are to be performed by women in domestic spaces (as mothers) or by underpaid proxies.

Although care work may often be valorized, those to whom the task of caring falls harbor no illusions concerning its daily toll. As artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles notes,



MANIFESTO!

MAINTENANCE ART -- Proposal for an Exhibition

"CARE" ©1969 Mierle Laderman Ukeles

I. IDEAS:

A. The Death Instinct and the Life Instinct:

The Death Instinct: separation, individuality, Avant-Garde par excellence; to follow one's own path to death--do your own thing, dynamic change.

The Life Instinct: unification, the eternal return, the perpetuation and MAINTENANCE of the species, survival systems and operations, equilibrium.

B. Two basic systems: Development and Maintenance. The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?
Development: pure individual creation; the new; change; progress, advance, excitement, flight or fleeing.
Maintenance: keep the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change; protect progress; defend and prolong the advance; renew the excitement; repeat the flight.

show your work--show it again
keep the contemporaryartmuseum groovy
keep the home fires burning

Development systems are partial feedback systems with major room for change.
Maintenance systems are direct feedback systems with little room for alteration.

Fig. 2
Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "MANIFESTO FOR MAINTENANCE ART, 1969! Proposal for an exhibition: 'CARE'," 1969. Written in Philadelphia, PA, October 1969. Four typewritten pages, each 8 ½ x 11 in. © Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

"Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time. The mind boggles and chafes at the boredom. The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs = minimum wages, housewives - no pay." Frustrated with the competing demands on her time while being an artist and a mother, Ukeles penned a "Manifesto for Maintenance Art" in 1969.[7] Structured as a proposal for an exhibition speculatively titled "CARE," the manifesto aims to resolve a tension between two systems: development and maintenance (fig. 2). "Development" characterizes the historical avant-garde (implicitly male, ceaselessly

7 Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969! Proposal for an exhibition 'CARE'," 1969.

oriented toward change, invested in positions of freedom), while the "Maintenance" system is explicitly female and marginalized, referencing the sustenance work of non or underpaid laborers that is necessary to the conditions of "development" but subsequently erased.[8] The resolution, then, is an intense focus on the maintenance work: on the cleaning, the sweeping, the fixing– elevating it within a viewing space so that it cannot be ignored.[9]

This quotidien domain of chores and routines is also fodder for Chancellor Maxwell, who keenly designs vignettes of beauty items and personal effects (pages 44–47). Using an array of sumptuous brush markers and a set square substrate, he revisits the regularly frequented countertops, corners, and cabinets of his personal and professional routines. Some of the same objects–like a checkered floor, or a bottle of soap–recur across his drawings, mimicking the banal repetition of their presence in his daily chores. There is a surprising intimacy to the works; they simulate the thrill of peeking into someone's bathroom cabinet to see what products they use in private. His lurid and liberal use of color and scale draws remarkable attention to these hidden salves that we use, without over-glamorizing our attachments. In Maxwell's drawings, the return to these cumbersome maintenance objects over and over again as the subjects

8 The "Manifesto for Maintenance Art" is frequently cited in discussions of feminist art, feminist labor, the ethics of performance and the representation of work within contemporary art. For more, see Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers. Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 164–165; Helen Molesworth, "House Work and Art Work," *October* 92 (Spring 2000), 71–97.

9 Twenty years after Ukeles's "Manifesto," philosopher Susan Moller Okin affirmed the cultural crisis at work when "care" was devalued. In *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, Okin argued using economic and civil case studies that a just society must materially value the domestic labor of maintaining private spaces. Specifically, she cites the often gendered division of household chores within family units as a breeding ground for gender-based injustice inequality. Okin (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 4, 155–156.

of his work is an attention to the routines of their use both in his self-care rituals and his artistic practice. While the work of cleaning up after ourselves and others is a burden, Maxwell here visualizes the routine itself as a reparative discipline.

Elliott Jerome Brown, Jr. is similarly interested in how routines of self-care are generative and reparative disciplines for his subjects.[10] While Maxwell, and Cwynar, depict routines primarily concerned with physical upkeep, Brown's probing rests in a more spiritual discipline of self-care. His photographs are particularly poignant and enviably lush following months of imposed distancing. By paying close attention to the sensuality and vulnerability of a passing touch, Brown's images romanticize precarious gestures (fig. 3). At the same time, his subjects are wholly contained in the photographs–gifted autonomy through physical and psychical distance. Several images taken in 2018 and 2019, for example, include barriers between Brown and his subjects—a distinction thrown into sharp relief as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. Brown describes *What the cumbersome takes away, the ritual gives back (after Camille)*, 2020 (page 2), as "nearing a hug," recognizing the play between a self-contained subject and the invitation of the photograph. This work, in particular, documents Brown's attention to an articulation of self-care as "tending to oneself."[11] Here is a spiritual self-care, an investment in identity formation by embracing habitual behaviors that may otherwise seem burdensome. Reframing chores as intentional practices—rituals, if you will—reifies their value in our lives. Perhaps through this intimate scrutiny we may, as Audre Lorde describes the outcome of poetry, "flourish within it, as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose

10 Janine Mileaf in conversation with Elliott Jerome Brown, Jr., August 5 and September 16, 2020.

11 Ibid.

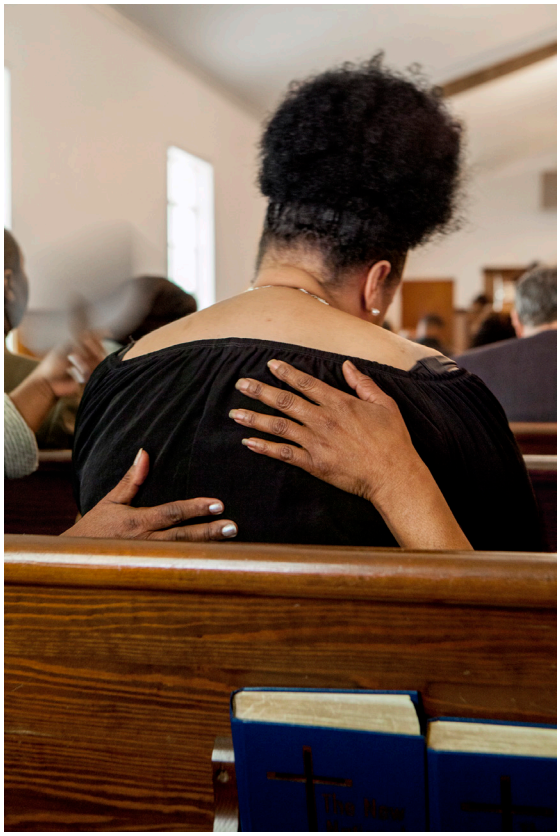


Fig .3
Elliott Jerome Brown, Jr., "Oftentimes, justice for black people takes the form of forgiveness, allowing them space to reclaim their bodies from wrongs made against them.," 2018. Archival Pigment Print. 36 x 24 in. (91.4 x 61 cm). Courtesy the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York.

their control over us."[12] As Brown documents, these intimate rituals of self-care are vital to feeling empowered, embodied, and autonomous, and yet somehow still unknown.

Care involves, then, not only the function of maintenance, but perhaps more so the opportunity for repair. Lorde explores this reparative dimension specifically as an optimistic form of resistance rather

12 Lorde, "Poetry is not a Luxury," *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Toronto: Crossing Press, 2007) (1977), 36.

than a mere resignation to preservation. While for Brown this reparative dimension is figured through subjectivity, the work of Bronwyn Katz subtly engages its bodily correlate. Katz strips found mattresses of their quilted cases, sculpting the remaining framework of iron coils and foam into elegiac wall hangings. In *Droom boek*, 2017, for example, the coils spring out from their constructed grid, reaching beyond the edges of the mattress frame and unwinding from their base (fig. 4). Caps cut from the yellow foam covering are nestled within the iron springs, softening the edges of the metal patchwork. Katz has cut the arranged circles along the pattern created when the mattress is in use: as the springs absorb and disperse the weight of a prone body, the foam is stamped in a grid, as preserved in the work *Blommetjies*, 2016. Katz's sculptures reference this bodily adjacency through a subtle deconstruction of material elements designed to absorb the stress of bearing our weight when resting.

However, there remains a subtly menacing tone to her sculptures, perhaps in the revelation and slight manipulation of structures that are familiar but often unseen. For Katz, who grew up in South Africa after the abolition of Apartheid, the works reference how carelessly lives can be thrown into a state of precarity through forced migration, economic hardship, and civil strife. The privilege to enjoy rest or to live in unremarkable stability relies on the ignored labor of others. Although the work included here is connected to the earlier works in that they are made of materials gathered at a defunct mattress factory in Paris, their forms are entirely abstracted from this reference (pages 42–43). Instead, their elegiac shapes are delicately wrought into streams of wire, ever so slightly bending toward and away from their base as they hang from the wall.

In Katz's work, we encounter a resistance to the singular figure of a caretaker as a mother, or a hospital worker, or a partner. Instead, her meticulous coiled sculptures

Fig .4
Bronwyn Katz, "Droom boek," 2017. Salvaged bed springs and mattress. 31. 5 x 59 x 19.6 in. (80 x 150 x 50 cm). Collection A4 Arts Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa. Image courtesy of the artist.

disquiet the unanimity of caretaking. They are nearly invisible against the wall while quietly and wistfully recalling an intimate space, calling our attention to the fragility of a form. It is shocking that such thin wires, such ghostly coils, prop up the beds on which we fall asleep each evening. More than a twee metaphor, Katz's work directs us toward an optimism in attending to the real labor required in maintaining our shared existences.

Although it may seem like a relic of previous feminisms, an *ethics of care* points us to the value in maintenance and collectivity. Moreso, it is through this appreciation that we may see a political horizon in which attention to care-work—both personal and interpersonal—prioritizes dignity. Through an *ethic of care* the ways in which we maintain ourselves in turn allow for the space, liberty, and attention to care for others. The works included in this exhibition slow down this upkeep and detangle how small acts of care inflect meaning on our daily lives. That many of these images contain an inkling of optimism and joy makes it clear that the true value in care is not as universalized as it may seem. It is also clear that it doesn't necessarily *look* like anything—that the recurrent images of bubble baths, nurses, or an outstretched palm fail to project where the real work of caring fits into our lives. Rather, they foreclose these political horizons into coercive messages of fulfillment that cheapens the real work required to make a life worth living, and share that value with one's community. Thus, the endeavor in this exhibition is not to visualize anything approximate to an "aesthetics of care," but closer perhaps to the simple display and elevation of familiar frustrations, chores, and joys—aspirationally "nearing a hug" in each encounter.