

THE TUNNEL

Adams and Ollman

**Jonathan Berger
Margaret Morton
Maria A. Prado**

June 5 - July 17, 2021

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Adams and Ollman is pleased to announce Jonathan Berger’s second solo exhibition with the gallery. The exhibition includes a new series of text sculptures, each of which is a discrete line fragment, excerpted from his recent large-scale project *An Introduction to Nameless Love*. These pieces are presented alongside work he has included by two of his collaborators from that project—the photographer Margaret Morton (1948-2020) and homeless women’s advocate and activist Maria A. Prado.

Jonathan Berger’s large-scale project, *An Introduction to Nameless Love*, was co-organized by and presented at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard (2019), and Participant Inc., New York (2020), and produced in collaboration with Mady Schutzman, Emily Anderson, Tina Beebe, Julian Bittiner, Matthew Brannon, Barbara Fahs Charles, Brother Arnold Hadd, Erica Heilman, Esther Kaplan, Margaret Morton, Richard Ogust, Maria A. Prado, Robert Staples, Michael Stipe, Mark Utter, Michael Wiener, and Sara Workneh. The project chronicles a series of remarkable relationships, each built on an extraordinary connection that lies outside the bounds of conventional romance. Each of these relationships reaches the profound intensity and transformative experience often associated with so-called “true love” but does so through bonds based in work, friendship, religion, service, mentorship, community, and family, as well as relationships between people and places, objects, and animals.

Adams and Ollman

The project seeks to both interrogate and vastly expand societal considerations of what love can be, where it can be found, who and what can possess it, and its potential to shape experience.

From 2014-2019, Berger conducted a series of dialogues with diverse subjects about these types of relationships. Drawing on conversations and correspondences, the ongoing outcome of this process was a series of autonomous texts, each of which was generated collaboratively between Berger, the subject(s), and a guest editor of specific significance to each story. The exhibition presented these narratives as a series of large-scale, text-based sculptures comprised of thousands of meticulously cut and formed tin letters.

For this exhibition, Berger isolates and removes lines from these larger texts which constitute *An Introduction to Nameless Love*, creating an installation of discrete floating silver tin quotations, words, terms, phrases, statements, and crystalline relational moments. Unlike the original exhibition, which functioned much like a book with chapters, Berger's presentation of small-scale pieces at Adams and Ollman renders an environment where seemingly disparate parts of each of these distinct stories form unlikely relationships to one another, further illuminating the project's overarching investigation of "nameless love" in new ways. In this regard, the environment Berger creates from these excerpts in Adams and Ollman's main gallery functions more philosophically, allowing for both direct moments of connection and transitional spaces of contemplation, speculation, and invention.

One of the stories chronicled in *An Introduction to Nameless Love* is that of Maria A. Prado, who lived underground from 1988-1995 and again from 2006-2007 as part of a homeless community known as The Tunnel, which occupied a two and a half

Adams and Ollman

mile long abandoned Amtrak freight train tunnel that ran under Manhattan's Riverside Park. The space was originally created by Robert Moses in 1934 in order to hide the Hudson River Railroad from the expensive apartments on Riverside Drive and became no longer operational in the early 1970s. The space began being occupied by the homeless in 1973 and continued to function as a self-sustaining self-governed community, of different inhabitant groups, each of which constituted a neighborhood of sorts, until all of the residents were evicted in 1996. Subsequently, several years later, the space began being inhabited again.

In 1991, Prado met the photographer and oral historian Margaret Morton, who had been invited to The Tunnel by a member of the community she had met in Riverside Park. Up until the initial evictions, Morton photographed a small group of residents, documenting their daily lives and the architectural dwellings they created within the vast concrete space. Her images and text from extensive interviews comprise her book *The Tunnel*, which was published by Yale Press in 1995. The book is broken into chapters which document the life of different members, including Prado.

In 2010 with encouragement by Morton, Prado began writing her life story. The text meticulously documents her search for her biological mother which brought her from Connecticut to her birthplace of New York City and the process of finding empowerment in the wake of her experiences with incarceration, homelessness, domestic violence and witnessing her community become HIV positive. Prado's twenty-one-year journey overcoming the struggles of street life, informed specifically by her Afro-Latina perspective, led her to found The Prado of Transitioning Forward, a transitional/congregate housing program to assist homeless women in becoming self-sufficient.

Concurrent with the exhibition, Prado will resume work on the

Adams and Ollman

unfinished manuscript of her memoir, *Findin' Ma*, collaborating with editor, writer, oral historian, and art historian Stephanie E. Goodalle, whose work focuses on the experiences of the Black diaspora. Throughout the two months that the exhibition is on view, pages of *Findin' Ma* will be displayed on one wall of the gallery as Prado and Goodalle complete them, allowing the book to unfold in real time.

Presented alongside Prado's writing is a cinematic slideshow that Morton assembled and narrated about *The Tunnel*. She created the video as an artist's talk, covering the four photographic projects for which she is best known, which include *Transitory Gardens*, *Uprooted Lives* (1993), *The Tunnel: The Underground Homeless of New York City* (1995), *Fragile Dwelling* (2000), and *Glass House* (2004). Each project serves as an archive of human perseverance in the face of adversity and the capacity of vernacular architecture created by self-organized alternative communities to serve as a force of agency, transformation, and self-actualization. Morton's images are imbued with the depth of her long-term relationships with those pictured in them.

Jonathan Berger (b. 1980, New York) lives and works in New York City. Over the past fifteen years, his practice has encompassed a spectrum of activity, pursuing a rigorous investigation of the many ways in which the exhibition site can be repurposed. He maintains an interest in abstract and experimental forms of non-fiction, including embodied biography and portraiture, as rendered through the creation of large-scale, narrative-based exhibitions made from both constructed and found objects. He has presented solo installation projects at the Carpenter Center for the Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; the Busan Biennial, South Korea; Vox Populi, Philadelphia; Participant, Inc., Maccarone, Karma, and Grimm-Rosenfeld Gallery, all New York; Frieze Projects, London; Adams and Ollman, Portland;

Adams and Ollman

and VEDA, Florence. His collaborative and curatorial projects have been presented at venues including MOCA, Los Angeles; The Hebbel Theater, Berlin; and The Queens Museum of Art, Participant Inc., and Performance Space 122, New York, among others. His current project, *The Store*, is on view at the Aspen Art Museum through 2021. From 2013–2016, Berger served as Director of 80WSE Gallery at NYU, where he mounted a wide range of major exhibitions and collaborative projects presenting the work of Ellen Cantor, Bob Mizer, Printed Matter, James Son Ford Thomas, Michael Stipe, Vaginal Davis, Susanne Sachsse, and xiu xiu, among others. He is a Clinical Associate Professor in the Department of Art and Art Professions at New York University.

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LIVING TOGETHER ALONE.

Jonathan Berger

LIVING TOGETHER ALONE.

From *Untitled (Brother Arnold Hadd, with Sarah Workneh)*, 2021

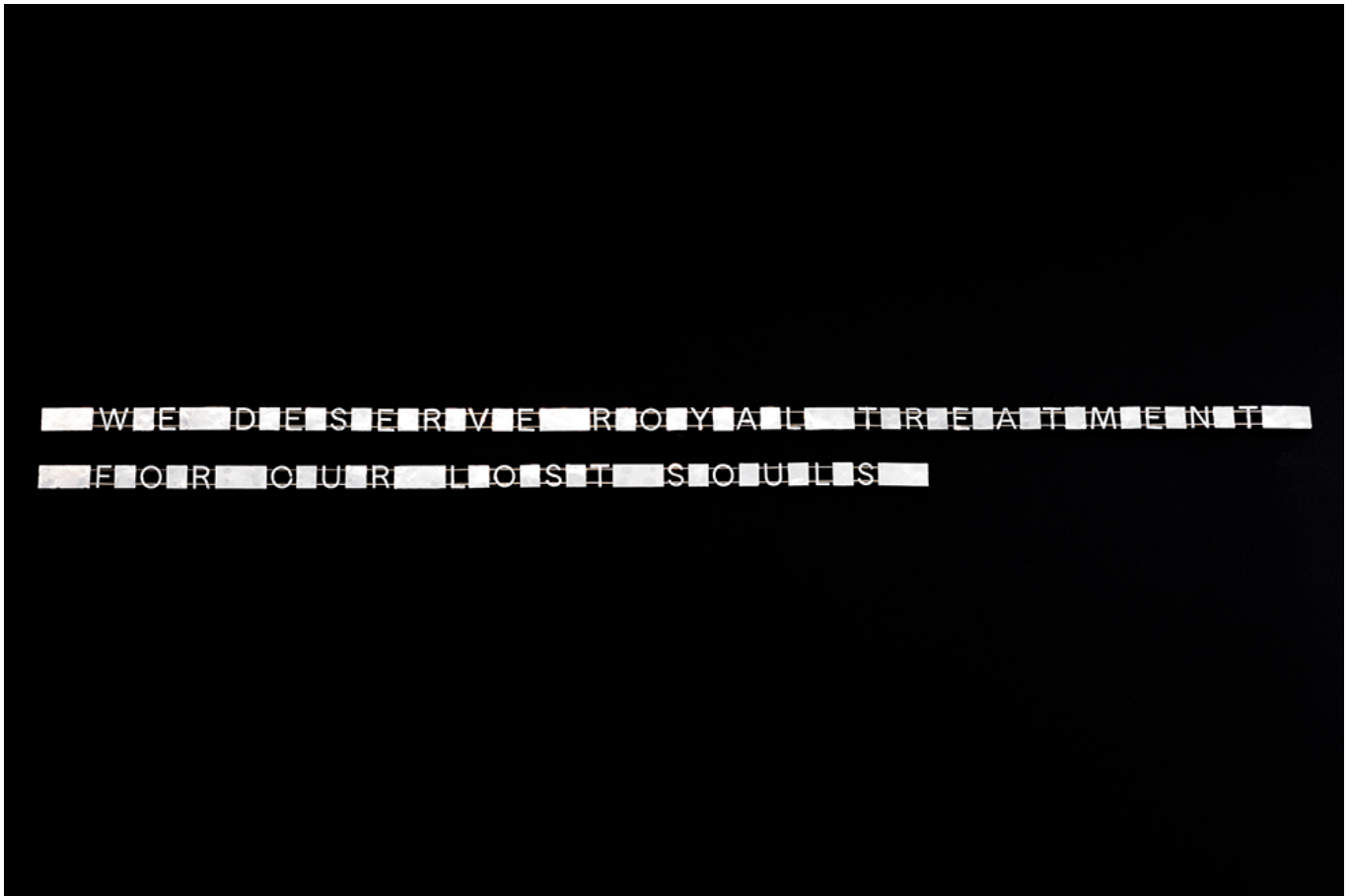
Tin, nickel

1.25h x 24.75w in / 3.18h x 62.87w cm

Bj-2021-018

TOGETHER

Adams and Ollman



Jonathan Berger

WE DESERVE ROYAL TREATMENT FOR OUR LOST SOULS

From *Untitled (Emily Anderson and Mark Utter, with Erica Heilman)*, 2019

Tin, nickel silver

4.38h x 48w in / 11.11h x 121.92w cm

Bj-2019-001

R O Y A L T

T S O U L S

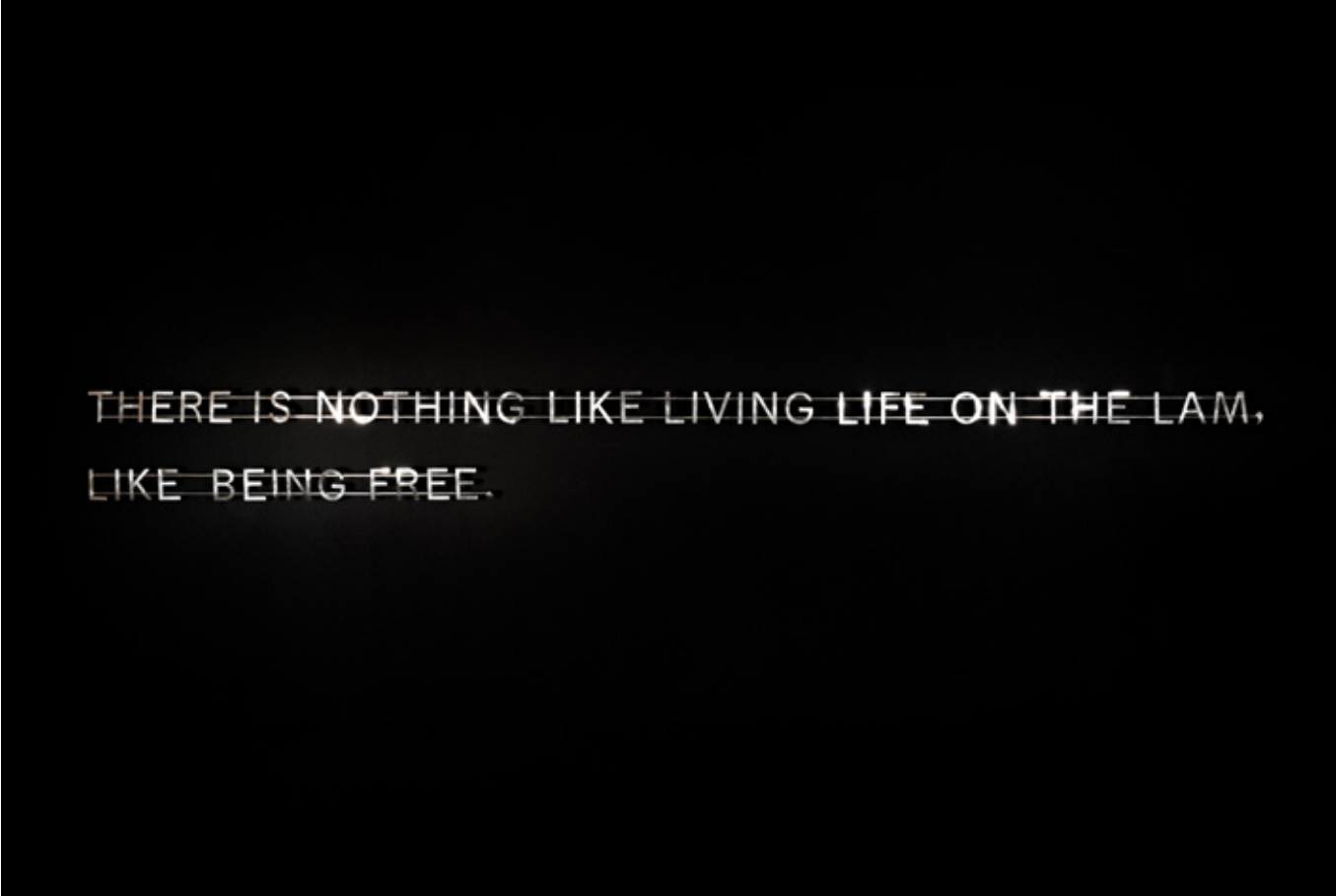
Adams and Ollman



Jonathan Berger
LONG GAME
From *Untitled (Emily Anderson and Mark Utter, with Erica Heilman)*, 2021
Tin, nickel
1.25h x 27.38w in
3.18h x 69.53w cm
Bj-2021-002

■ G ■ A ■ M ■ E ■

Adams and Ollman



THERE IS ~~NOTHING~~ LIKE ~~LIVING~~ ~~LIFE~~ ~~ON~~ ~~THE~~ ~~LAM~~,
LIKE ~~BEING~~ ~~FREE~~.

Jonathan Berger

THERE IS NOTHING LIKE LIVING LIFE ON THE LAM, LIKE BEING FREE.

From *Untitled* (Maria A. Prado and Margaret Morton, with Esther Kaplan), 2021

Tin, nickel

4.50h x 47.50w in / 11.43h x 120.65w cm

Bj-2021-015

LIKE LIVING

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~~WE DECIDED TO GO INSIDE THE WALLS.~~
~~THIS WAS A SECRET THING WE HAD GOING ON.~~
~~WE'D COME DOWN HERE. WE'D COME HOME.~~
~~NOBODY KNEW NOTHING.~~

Jonathan Berger

WE DECIDED TO GO INSIDE THE WALLS. THIS WAS A SECRET THING WE HAD GOING ON. WE'D COME DOWN HERE. WE'D COME HOME. NOBODY KNEW NOTHING.

From *Untitled (Maria A. Prado and Margaret Morton, with Esther Kaplan)*, 2021

Tin, nickel

11h x 46.50w in / 27.94h x 118.11w cm

Bj-2021-016

GO INSID

ET THIN

N HERE.

OTHING.



THE TUNNEL

Jonathan Berger

THE TUNNEL

From *Untitled (Maria A. Prado and Margaret Morton, with Esther Kaplan)*, 2021

Tin, nickel

1.25h x 11.50w in / 3.18h x 29.21w cm

Bj-2021-013

E TUNNE

Adams and Ollman

A large black rectangular artwork with white text. The text is centered and reads: "AND SHE SAID, ~~THEY'RE~~ GOING TO COME LIKE ~~DOVES~~. AND THEY DID." The words "THEY'RE" and "DOVES" are crossed out with horizontal lines.

AND SHE SAID, ~~THEY'RE~~ GOING TO COME LIKE ~~DOVES~~. AND THEY DID.

Jonathan Berger

AND SHE SAID, THEY'RE GOING TO COME LIKE DOVES. AND THEY DID.

From *Untitled (Brother Arnold Hadd, with Sarah Workneh)*, 2021

Tin, nickel

1.25h x 67w in / 3.18h x 170.18w cm

Bj-2021-007

'RE GOING TO

Adams and Ollman



Jonathan Berger

AND NOW FOR THE MIRACLE OF MIRACLES.

From *Untitled* (Emily Anderson and Mark Utter, with Erica Heilman), 2021

Tin, nickel

1.25h x 91.50w in / 3.18h x 232.41w cm

Bj-2021-006

MIRACLES

Adams and Ollman



Jonathan Berger

EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE BETTER. I'M TELLING YOU, EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE FINE.'

From *Untitled (Emily Anderson and Mark Utter, with Erica Heilman)*, 2021

Tin, nickel

7.75h x 81.50w in / 19.69h x 207.01w cm

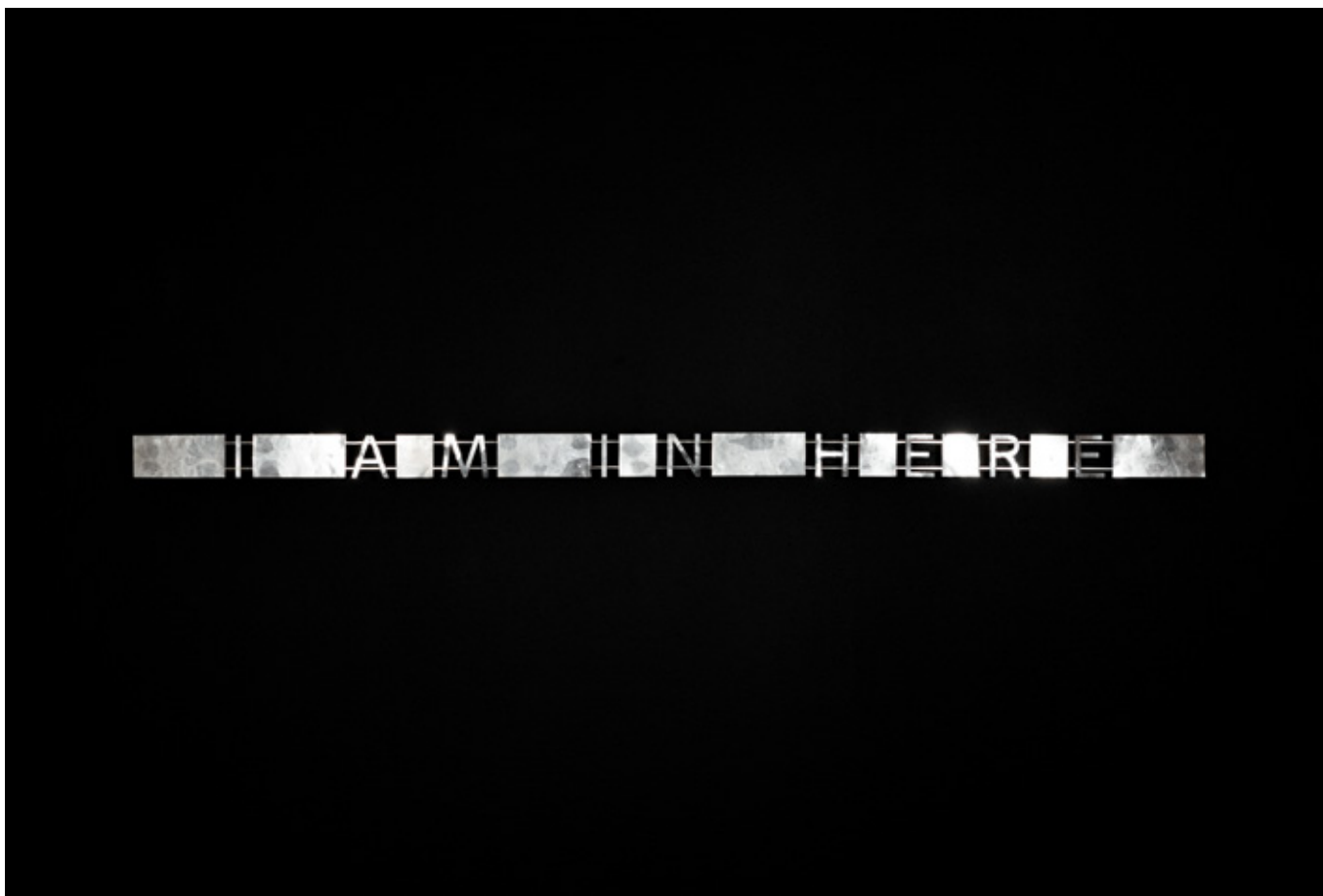
Bj-2021-005

S [] G [] O []

Y [] O [] U [] , []

S [] G [] O []

Adams and Ollman



Jonathan Berger

I AM IN HERE

From *Untitled (Emily Anderson and Mark Utter, with Erica Heilman)*, 2021

Tin, nickel

1.25h x 31.75w in / 3.18h x 80.65w cm

Bj-2021-003

HERIE

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THE LITTLE GREEN BIRD SAYS:
I AM TIRED OF SO MANY FRIENDLESS DAYS
IN MY LIFE.
I WANT TO KNOW HOW IT FEELS
TO HAVE OLD COLD LONESOME LONGING
FOR LOVE GONE.

Jonathan Berger

'THE LITTLE GREEN BIRD SAYS: I AM TIRED OF SO MANY FRIENDLESS DAYS IN MY LIFE. I WANT TO KNOW HOW IT FEELS TO HAVE OLD COLD LONESOME LONGING FOR LOVE GONE.'

From *Untitled* (Emily Anderson and Mark Utter, with Erica Heilman), 2021

Tin, nickel

17.50h x 92.25w in / 44.45h x 234.32w cm

Bj-2021-001

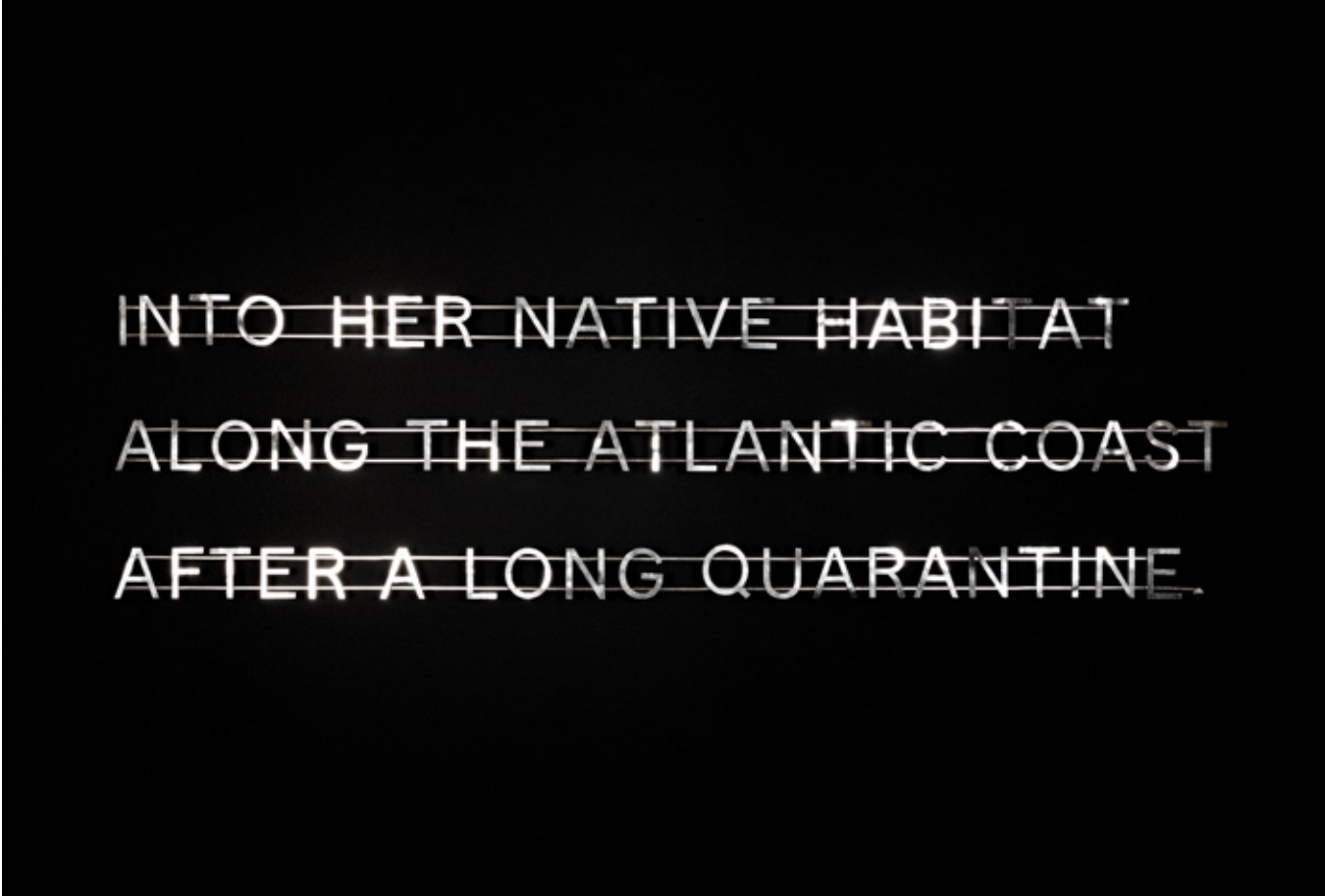
IBIRD

MAINY

OWIT

D, L O N

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INTO HER NATIVE HABITAT
ALONG THE ATLANTIC COAST
AFTER A LONG QUARANTINE.

Jonathan Berger

INTO HER NATIVE HABITAT ALONG THE ATLANTIC COAST AFTER A LONG QUARANTINE.

From *Untitled* (Richard Ogust), 2021

Tin, nickel

7.75h x 30.50w in / 19.69h x 77.47w cm

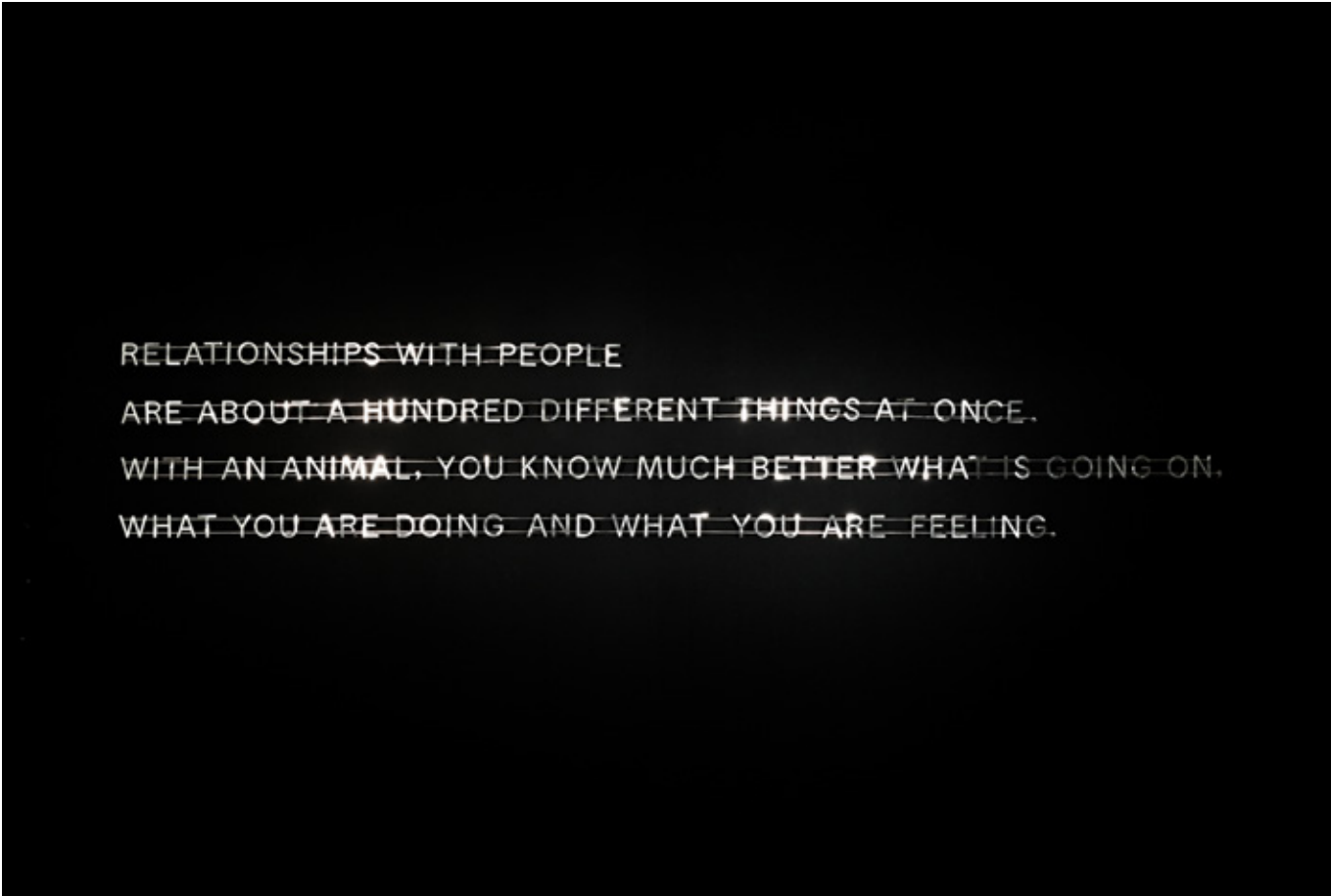
Bj-2021-024

ALTERNATIVE

ATLANTIC

CONQUER

Adams and Ollman



RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE
ARE ABOUT A HUNDRED DIFFERENT THINGS AT ONCE.
WITH AN ANIMAL, YOU KNOW MUCH BETTER WHAT IS GOING ON,
WHAT YOU ARE DOING AND WHAT YOU ARE FEELING.

Jonathan Berger

*RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE ARE ABOUT A HUNDRED DIFFERENT THINGS AT ONCE. WITH AN ANIMAL,
YOU KNOW MUCH BETTER WHAT IS GOING ON, WHAT YOU ARE DOING AND WHAT YOU ARE FEELING.*

From *Untitled* (Richard Ogust), 2021

Tin, nickel

11h x 62.50w in / 27.94h x 158.75w cm

Bj-2021-025

PEOPLE

RED DIFFE

OU KNOW

G AND W

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Margaret Morton
Fragile Dwelling, 2017
video
28 min
©OmbraLuce 2017
MM_001

Adams and Ollman



Margaret Morton
The Tunnel: The Underground Homeless of New York City
Yale University Press; First Edition, November 29, 1995
160 pages
MM_002

Adams and Ollman



Maria A. Prado
Findin' Ma, 2021-ongoing
Edited by Stephanie E. Goodalle
MP001

Adams and Ollman



Jonathan Berger, Margaret Morton, Maria A. Prado, installation view
June 5 - July 17, 2021
Adams and Ollman, Portland, OR

Adams and Ollman



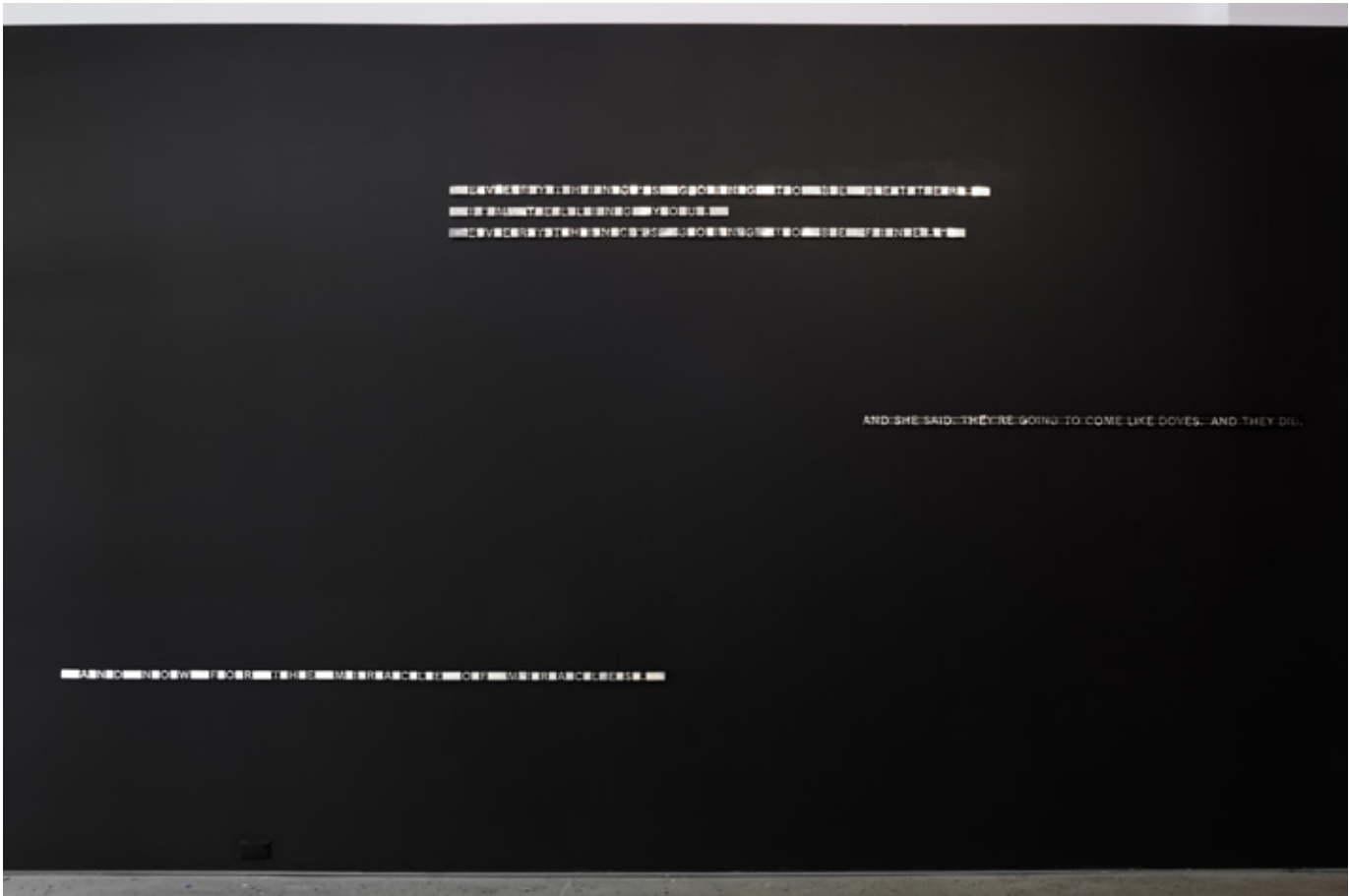
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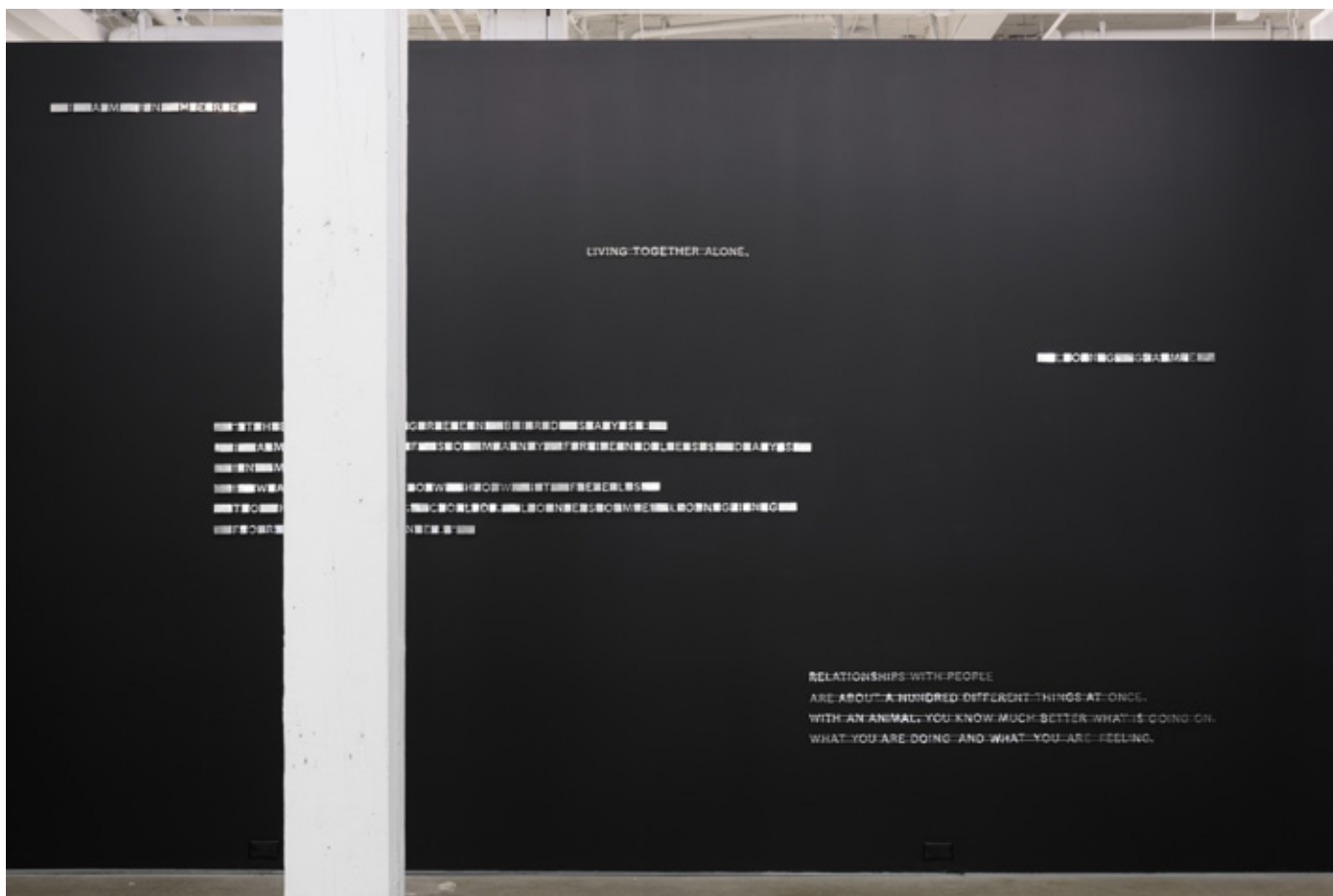
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Adams and Ollman, Portland, OR

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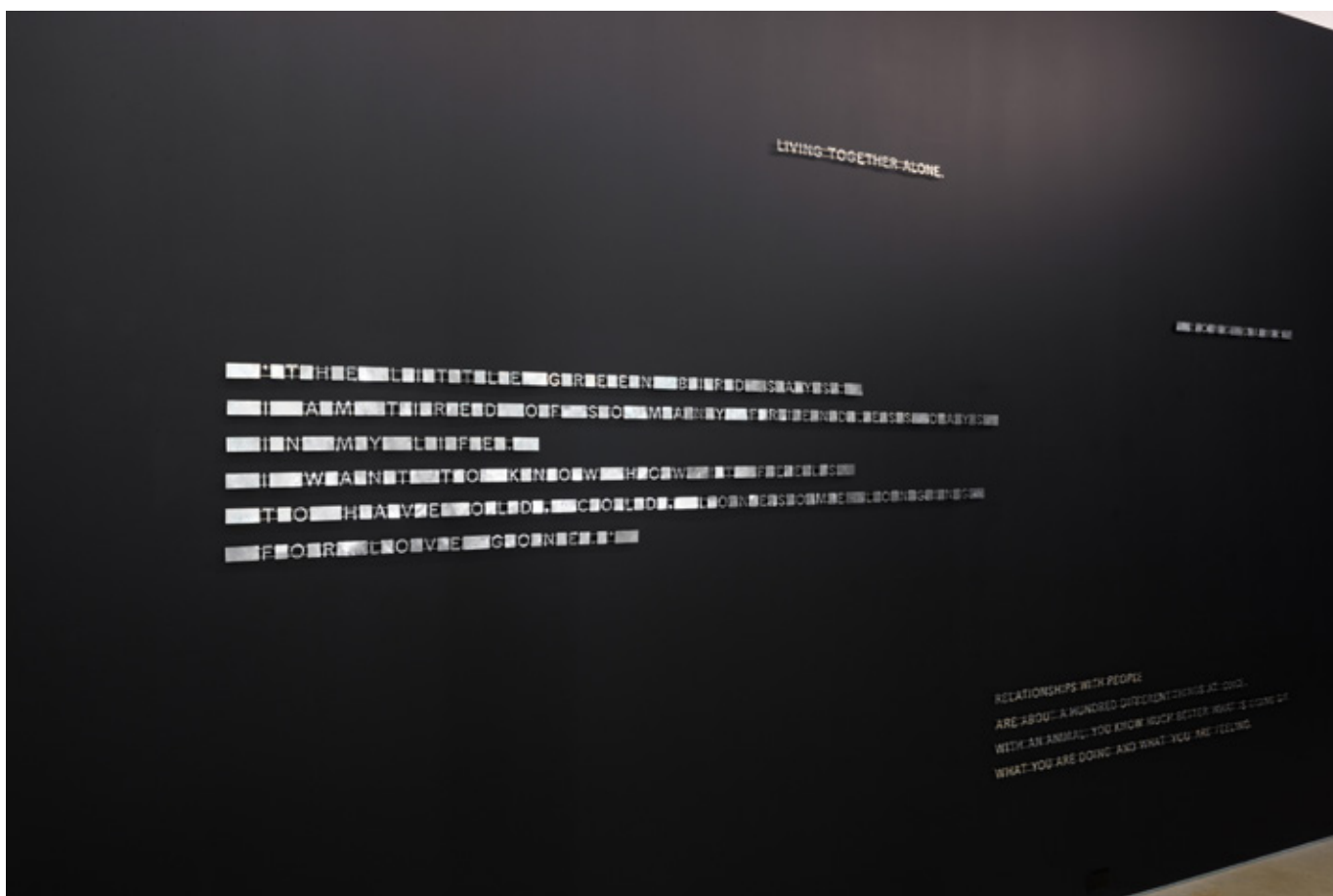
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*Jonathan Berger, Margaret Morton, Maria A. Prado, installation view
June 5 - July 17, 2021
Adams and Ollman, Portland, OR*

Adams and Ollman



Jonathan Berger, Margaret Morton, Maria A. Prado, installation view
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Adams and Ollman, Portland, OR

Adams and Ollman

**Jonathan Berger
Press, CV**

VULTURE

The 10 Best Art Shows of 2020 Jordan Casteel, Noah Davis, and anything you could see in person.

Jerry Saltz, December 11, 2020

Pleasure is an important form of knowledge, and in art, pleasure comes from the bodily confirmation of seeing things in the flesh. That form of knowledge slipped away early this year. In our diminished physical spaces of quarantine, we could no longer take part in that ancient discourse of pleasure, and a pensive somnambulance set in. Then, in late May, the pressure of the pandemic was forcibly mixed with things that have lingered in the American night since our founding — and they exploded. The George Floyd protests initiated the next stage: Everyone went out again, all at the same time. We rediscovered one another. And something else too: the bodily confirmation of the town square, where activism could become a form of creativity.

This year reconfigured everything. Experiencing art in galleries and museums, being together, has taken on a new urgency, with added density and intensity. Nothing is neutral here. We're now hyperaware that art lives in mutinous, contested space.

Our simplified daily lives, spent alone or in small groups, have mushroomed into a supercharged collective consciousness — one that will make our eventual return to communal space different. And, I think, better.

5. “Jonathan Berger: An Introduction to Nameless Love” (Participant Inc.)

Berger's mystical installation swept me off my feet: a series of large nickel-wire scaffolds covered in thousands of one-inch-tall handcrafted letters spelling out visionary texts appropriated from artists, religious figures, designers, activists, and others. The effect was a temple of rhapsodic wisdom and pulsing prose. Sculptural poetry from a maker who deserves a MacArthur.



Installation view of Jonathan Berger's *An Introduction to Nameless Love*.

Photo: Mark Waldhauser

The New York Times

The Most Important Moments in Art in 2020

This was a year of protests and pivots. Monuments fell, museums looked inward. On the bright side, galleries persisted despite the pandemic's grip and curators rolled out magisterial retrospectives.

Holland Cotter, Roberta Smith and Jason Farago, December 4, 2020

Roberta Smith

Persistence in the Face of a Pandemic

The main story everywhere this year was the coronavirus: how it disrupted or reshaped specific spheres of activity, or left parts of them largely unscathed. The art world witnessed dizzying combinations of these outcomes, which are still unfolding. One surprise was the almost instantaneous financial fragility of museums and the stalwartness of art galleries of all shapes and sizes. When the virus arrived, an especially strong art season had been underway.

3. 'Jonathan Berger at Participant Inc.'

One of the best exhibitions yet mounted by this venerable alternative space was Jonathan Berger's installation "An Introduction to Nameless Love," which opened in March and reopened again in September. It filled the space with shimmering texts of cut metal that delved into unusual relationships, including that of the turtle conservationist Richard Ogust and the diamondback terrapin that pointed him toward his calling. The floor beneath the letters was their exact opposite in terms of material: It was black, matte and slightly soft and made of thousands of small cubes of charcoal that expressed their own kind of tenderness.

ARTFORUM

Best of 2020

Thomas J. Lax

Thomas J. Lax, December 2020

2. JONATHAN BERGER (PARTICIPANT INC, NEW YORK)

For Berger's installation *An Introduction to Nameless Love*, the gallery floors were covered with half a million charcoal cubes on which stood text-based sculptures composed of countless one-inch hand-soldered tin letters spelling out stories of unspoken affection: between a conservationist and a diamondback terrapin, an autistic philosopher and a communication supporter, a Shaker and furniture. These tales of nonromantic attachment proposed queer alternatives to hetero- and homonormative longing, matter-of-factly narrating the connections formed among people, animals, and inanimate objects. All of the accounts end in a generous act of letting go.



Jonathan Berger, *Untitled* (Tina Beebe, Barbara Fahs Charles, Robert Staples, and Michael Wiener, with Matthew Brannon)/*Untitled* (My Name Is Ray, by Michael Stipe), 2019, tin, nickel. Installation view, Participant Inc, New York. Photo: Mark Waldhauser.

ARTFORUM

Best of 2020 Johanna Fateman

Johanna Fateman, December 2020

3. JONATHAN BERGER (PARTICIPANT INC, NEW YORK)

A display of daunting, labor-intensive complexity, Berger's numinous exhibition "An Introduction to Nameless Love" was a hypnagogic visitation of scrolling, swirling messages. Meticulously soldered tin letters arranged into text-based sculptures featuring quotes culled from diverse sources, an astonishing floor of charcoal cubes, and spooky lighting formed a moving tribute to socially uncelebrated, rarely described, life-sustaining kinds of love.



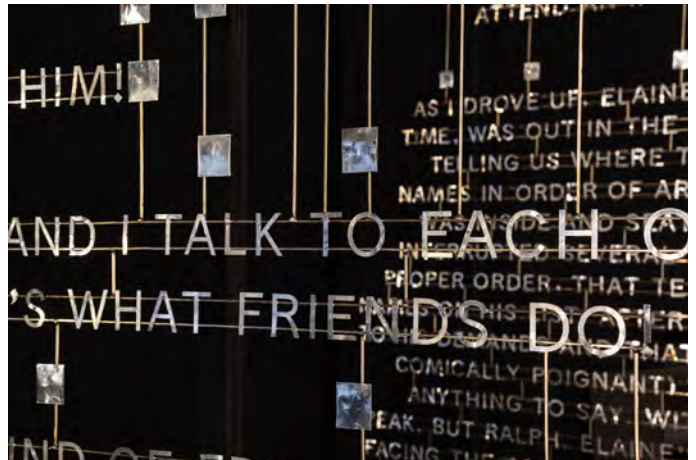
Jonathan Berger, *Untitled (Tina Beebe, Barbara Fahs Charles, Robert Staples, and Michael Wiener, with Matthew Brannon)/Untitled (My Name Is Ray, by Michael Stipe)*, 2019, tin, nickel. Installation view, Participant Inc, New York. Photo: Mark Waldhauser.

THE NEW YORKER

“Jonathan Berger: An Introduction to Nameless Love”

Andrea K. Scott, November 2020

Jonathan Berger is an unusual artist. You could mistake him for a biographer. One acclaimed piece—both a work of art and a curatorial project, as is Berger’s habit—divined the mysteries of Andy Kaufman. (Performance is often on Berger’s mind.) In the beautiful exhibition “An Introduction to Nameless Love,” at Participant Inc. (through Dec. 6; appointments, via participantinc.org, are necessary), which debuted at Harvard’s Carpenter Center, Berger again shares the lives of others. In this case, the subjects are six people who have found life-altering connections beyond the you-complete-me clichés of romance, including the autistic philosopher Mark Utter, the turtle conservationist Richard Ogust, and Maria A. Prado, who once lived in a homeless enclave beneath New York City. Their stories are spelled out in thirty-three thousand hand-cut tin letters suspended on nickel wire, shimmering planes that can turn the act of reading into a full-body experience. To take in the words of Brother Arnold Hadd, one of the last living Shakers, for instance, you have to pace methodically back and forth, as if performing a devotional ritual. A delightful book of inventive nonfiction—musings on intimacy—by Mady Schutzman, titled “Behold the Elusive Night Parrot,” was published in tandem with the exhibition.



Courtesy the artist and Participant Inc.

Forbes

Jonathan Berger's New Exhibition Is A Cathedral To True Love

Brienne Walsh, Aug 24, 2020

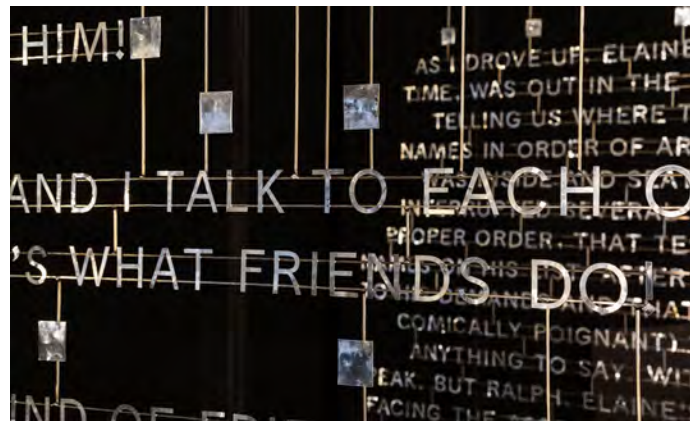
The genesis of Jonathan Berger's exhibition *An Introduction to Nameless Love*, which will be open at Participant Inc in New York from September 9 through October 11, 2020, was the five-year-long friendship the artist had with fellow artist Ellen Cantor, who died in 2013. The relationship was platonic, but intense. "I realized, after she died, that it was the closest that I had ever come to true love," Berger said.

True love, Berger notes, is at the top of our society's hierarchy of romance. Traditionally, in popular culture, it is embodied by heterosexual couples that meet, and cannot deny their attraction to one another, no matter how hard they fight it. But true love, Berger realized in the process of mourning Cantor, can encompass many different types of relationships — the relationship between friends, or collaborators, or caretakers, or even with animals. It can encompass relationships conducted entirely over text message, or relationships that don't have language at all. The deeper the love, the harder it is to define. "To me, true love is when something is happening beyond your comprehension," Berger say

Berger, whose practice is very much research based, began examining relationships that, to him, defined a more inclusive, and elusive, form of true love than that captured by princes and princesses, hot skinny models and bulky men. He met with people, and recorded their stories. In the end, for the exhibition at Participant — the show has already appeared at Harvard University's Carpenter Center — he focused on five different love stories, featuring designers Charles and Ray Eames, turtle conservationist Richard Ogust, the last living Shaker brother, Arnold Hadd, the autistic philosopher and writer Mark Utter and his communicator, Emily Anderson, and Maria Prado, a former resident of the New York City underground homeless community known as The Tunnel. Their narratives are joined by *Behold the Elusive Night Parrot*, informed by a two-year correspondence between



Jonathan Berger, *An Introduction to Nameless Love*, installation view at Participant Inc, New York.
PHOTO: MARK WALDHAUSER.



Jonathan Berger, *Untitled* (from *Behold the Elusive Night Parrot*, by Mady Schutzman), 2019. Installation view at Participant Inc, New York.
PHOTO: CARTER SEDDON

Berger and the text's author, scholar Mady Schutzman.

Working with editors to provide a grounding perspective, Berger distilled each of the many interviews he did with his subjects down to a single chapter on each, which he then manifested in the physical realm. Which is to say that he created the chapters out of 33,000 individual tin letters, meticulously fashioned by Berger and a team of associates, and hand soldered them on nickel wire backings. The resulting works are gleaming, delicate tapestries that will hang from the ceiling in Participant like shrouds, dividing the gallery. In the center of the room, a string of text bent to resemble a globe surrounded by ribbons, will provide as an axis point in the gallery. The floor of the gallery will be covered in 500,000 charcoal cubes that swallow light, and have the effect of making the tapestries gleam even more.

Berger very much wanted to create an installation that was labor intensive. "We made the pieces the way we did, with such long, complicated, and meticulous work, because we wanted the exhibition to be devotional."

He sees the final exhibition as a manifestation of the ephemeral that you might ordinarily find in a site like Pompeii, or in a cathedral. "I hesitate to use the word holy, but there is a sort of importance or grandeur to the installation that aligns with the meaning in the stories," he says.

The works are both easy, and impossible, to read. At first glance, they resemble streams of computer code, or a waterfall. It takes some concentration to step close to the work, and ground your mind in the stories.

"I was already in love with this turtle," reads one wall of text. "But seeing the hatchlings emerge from their eggs I was completely overtaken."

"Emily: For two hours a week he came. I only knew his mind," begins another.

The exhibition initially opened in March, right before New York City shut down — it quickly was shuttered. After six months lockdown and heartache, when the world recalibrated what human relationships mean when you cannot touch one another, and in turn, found new ways to fall in love, the exhibition will be alive, poignant, and exquisite beyond measure, especially if you have found your version of true love in this strange reality. If you are in New York, go see it. I'll be jealous of you all the way south, in Savannah.



Jonathan Berger, Untitled (Emily Anderson and Mark Utter, with Erica Heilman), 2019. Installation view at Participant Inc, New York.

PHOTO: MARK WALDHAUSER.

BROOKLYN RAIL

Jonathan Berger: An Introduction to Nameless Love

Ksenia Soboleva, August 2020

Not long before COVID-19 rendered in-person art viewing a faint memory, I walked into a dimly lit gallery where clusters of illuminated words appeared to float in space, like the digital rain of the *Matrix*. Yet unlike computer code, I could read these clusters of text—they were conversations, poems, confessions. “What can I ask you that nobody seems to ever ask you?” one began. “After months of being in that funk, I got accustomed to it,” another one continued.

Jonathan Berger’s large-scale installation *An Introduction to Nameless Love* has taken over every square foot of Participant Inc, curatorial icon Lia Gangitano’s beloved not-for-profit art space on the Lower East Side. As the press release states, the work is rooted in Berger’s exploration of relationships that exist “outside the bounds of conventional romance.” This concept is inspired by his close friendship with artist Ellen Cantor, who passed away in 2013—serendipitously, the two artists first met at Participant Inc in 2006. For several years now, Berger has been engaged in an ongoing and wide-ranging series of conversations about the idea of unconventional love. At Participant, six of these conversations have been materialized into skeins of letters mounted on wire armatures—they are textual sculptures, or perhaps more accurately, sculptural texts.

At the same time as he documents the dialogues he has carried out with his interlocutors, Berger also draws in excerpts from song lyrics, poetry, and nonfiction, and invites guest editors (none of whom are editors by profession) to work with him. What emerges are texts that balance oral history and poetry—grouped together like stanzas—that follow a mysterious structure. Consisting of tin, each letter is manually crafted with a consistency in shape and size that leaves the viewer mesmerized by the meticulous hand labor required. One sculpture departs from the flat, page-like form of the others. Instead, it curves into a multifaceted textual sphere that is placed



Installation view: Jonathan Berger: An Introduction to Nameless Love, Participant, Inc., New York, 2020. Courtesy Participant, Inc. Photo: Mark Waldhauser.



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towards the back of the gallery, surrounded by intricate textual waves resting on the floor.

Berger's desire to think through the complexities of love is not particularly visionary, nor is he the first artist to materialize language. It is, however, his integration of these two impulses that is so alluring. Contemporary art historians often identify figures like Bruce Nauman and Jenny Holzer as artists who understand how tightly body and language are intertwined, even to the point that they can function one in place of the other. However, the groundbreaking work of these artists has parallels in the past. Those who have dipped into premodern art historical scholarship know that similar ideas existed during medieval times, when monastic script was considered to be a voice that speaks without a body, allowing the dead to converse with the living. It is this longer history that Berger draws upon.



Installation view: Jonathan Berger: *An Introduction to Nameless Love*, Participant, Inc., New York, 2020. Courtesy Participant, Inc.
Photo: Mark Waldhauser.

Berger's installation is not one of short, moralistic phrases or neon-lit, loaded words. The scope of the text he employs mimics that of memorials—think of the long list of names etched into the black graphite walls of Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veteran Memorial* (1982), or Holzer's lengthy rendition of a Walt Whitman poem for the *New York City AIDS Memorial* (2016). Or, to once again take a longer view of history, think of ancient Egyptian stelae, many of which were used for memorial purposes. Berger's installation develops a parallel with traditional memorials, yet what he is trying to memorialize is something abstract, something not yet extinct but increasingly endangered: our ability to communicate intimacy through language. In *An Introduction to Nameless Love*, the word “nameless” sits in the sentence uncomfortably, exposing our failure to meaningfully describe and name certain forms of love. Berger's installation creates a haptic archive, in which a group of people commit to communicating their intimacies through language, shedding light on the “nameless” with words. Berger, in turn, allows for the words to take up real space, occupying the physical realm in which we are accustomed to manifesting our intimacies. Who can picture what words look like on their own, separate from a screen, or even a page?

The Brazilian novelist Clarice Lispector once wrote: “I want to grab the word in my hand. Is the word an object?” This question has been lingering on my mind, as I find myself drafting handwritten letters for the first time in years, frantically searching for stamps in the junk drawer. In truth, there is nothing I can say with ink on paper that I cannot say with an email, only more room for grammatical error. Yet in this time of social distancing, when we are forced to imagine new ways of expressing intimacy, communicating my words as objects feels as if it gives more of myself than a text message or a Zoom session would allow. I find myself craving the objecthood of words, the physical movement my wrist makes as I construct a sentence. While Participant Inc has temporarily closed its doors, Berger's piece resonates even more powerfully now than when I saw it in person. Deprived of physical contact, I start to question the virtual forms of communication that we've all become so accustomed to. I relish the material presence of words. Like Lispector, I want to grab the word in my hand. I know that I am not alone in this.

The New York Times

Four Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now

Jonathan Berger through Oct. 11. Participant Inc

Roberta Smith, July 22, 2020

“An introduction to Nameless Love,” Jonathan Berger’s large, text-based installation at Participant Inc., is one of the sleeping beauties of the New York gallery lockdown. Luckily, it will reawaken Sept. 9 for a month.

I saw it during its initial opening five months ago, and was dazzled by its silvery texts, seeming to hang in midair and surrounded by darkness. They have stayed in my mind, aided by the wise and generous love-knows-no-bounds title; the crucial phrase is Allen Ginsberg’s, from a 1974 interview. The pieces make us privy to six unconventional relationships detailed in carefully culled words, and reiterated more abstractly in two tenderly handled complementary materials.

The show is an extensive collaboration, most of all between Mr. Berger and the people writing or talking about their own relationships or those they have witnessed. He knows most of them well, and participated in the creation of their texts, as did other friends, acting as facilitators or editors.

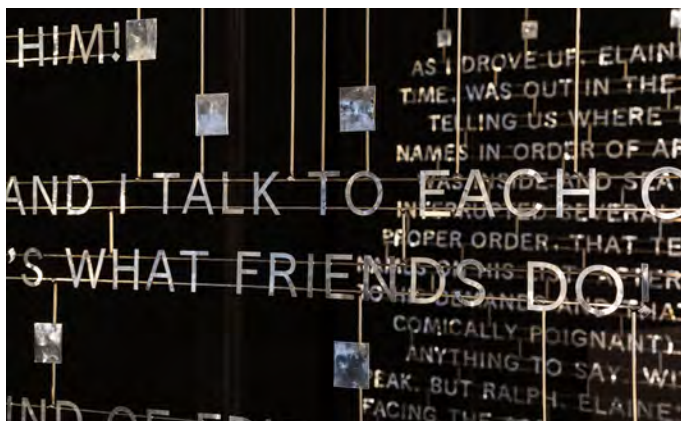
Made of one-inch letters punched out in a combination of tin and nickel, some of the texts are the size of walls; others aren’t much bigger than the tops of card tables; one is in the shape of a sphere. The words pull you in. “My aunt Rhoda died at the age of thirty-seven when I was fifteen years old,” begins a bit of memoir from Mady Schutzman’s book “Behold the Elusive Night Parrot.” She describes how inheriting and using her aunt’s clothing, jewelry and artworks led her to become a “living archive.”

An expanse of words in the shape of a towering gateway presents “The Tunnel,” in which Maria A. Prado is interviewed by Margaret Morton, known for documenting the homeless, with Esther Kaplan, the



Jonathan Berger’s installation “An Introduction to Nameless Love,” which is on view at Participant Inc.’s website.

Mark Waldhauser



Among the installation’s texts are this excerpt from Mady Schutzman’s “Behold the Elusive Night Parrot.”

Carter Seddon

executive editor of the Reveal Center for Investigative Reporting. Ms. Prado, a former resident of New York City's underground homeless community, describes how the experience shaped, and maybe saved, her life, making her more sensitive to others and also more assertive.

The turtle conservationist Richard Ogust recounts the chance meeting with a diamondback terrapin — a true romance in many ways — that set him on course to gather and oversee the second largest captive group of endangered turtles in the country. We also hear from the Shaker Brother Arnold Hadd; the autistic writer and philosopher Mark Utter; and former assistants of the dynamic design duo Ray and Charles Eames, about whom Michael Stipe has written a song — “My Name is Ray” — whose lyrics surround the sculptural sphere.

The darkness enveloping all this shimmering language is most notable for a mysterious floor that seems covered entirely with tiny black tiles, strangely soft and a little dusty looking. They are actually small cubes of charcoal. This expanse of beautiful, immediate, absorbent, dumb material couldn't be more different from the equally beautiful noise above. Constructed with great care — and no adhesives — the floor is a palpable act of love that, despite its muteness, amplifies the entire show as such.

Frieze

The Best Shows in New York During Armory Week

Evan Moffitt, March 04, 2020

Jonathan Berger
Participant Inc.
23 February – 5 April

I'll confess: I'm not fond of exhibitions that require a lot of reading, at least not in the gallery. Although 'An Introduction to Nameless Love,' Jonathan Berger's show at Participant Inc., features a lot of text – 33,000 letters to be precise, each cut and hand-hammered individually from tin – it's like a book I'd love to live inside. Glimmering quotes from interviews with a wide range of subjects – from Shaker Brother Arnold Hadd to turtle conservationist Richard Ogust – are mounted on wire grids so fine that they merge diaphanously with one another. A floor of cubed charcoal briquettes crackles underfoot. As the show's title suggests, the words here are all about kinds of love that aren't strictly romantic: for instance, our passion for animals or our devotion to god. Musings by designers Charles and Ray Eames form a celestial orb in the back of the gallery and unfurl like ribbons on the floor around it. Bring your glasses and plan to stay awhile.



Jonathan Berger, *An Introduction to Nameless Love*, 2019, installation detail. Courtesy: the artist and Participant Inc, New York; photograph: Mark Waldhauser

FOR LOVE GONE and on the negotiation of his BODY AND MIND CONNECTION DISORDER (autism). Here, opaque spacers between the letters signified the time it took for him to choose them one by one with an assistant. Those of us who are permitted to forget that textual experience is always fragmentary and durational are prone to speak of it as though it could be otherwise.

I'm doing that right now, describing my encounter as if it had started out with understanding, when in fact the exhibition carefully preempted instantaneous consumption. The soft scrape of the charcoal blocks beneath my feet distracted me each time I moved to orient my body toward the hanging lines of words. The brightness of the lights' changing reflections on the metal letters hurt my eyes. My reading often dissipated in the overlapping interactions of the parallel, transparent, floating pages. As sensorial reminders of my presence in the gallery prolonged my effort to compose the words into a coherent text, I thought of Thomas Hobbes reflecting on the dictum "Read thyself." The formal textures Berger lent the textual encounter had accentuated a reflexiveness of reading that, according to the author of *Leviathan* (1651), is itself an instrument of care: "Whosoever looketh into himself and considereth what he doth when he does think, opine, reason, hope, fear, etc. . . . shall thereby read and know what are the thoughts and passions of all other men." Not only was this exhibition about some nameless loves, but it also pointed to and activated a persistent possibility of love within the structure of reception—of reading in general.

Adams and Ollman

JONATHAN BERGER

Born 1980 New York, NY

Lives and works in New York, NY

SELECT SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 Adams and Ollman, Portland, OR
VEDA, Florence, Italy
Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO
An Introduction to Nameless Love, Participant Inc, New York, NY
- 2019 *An Introduction to Nameless Love*, Carpenter Center, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
- 2018 *901 Washington Blvd. With Michael Stipe*, VEDA, Florence, IT
- 2016 *A Future Life*, Adams and Ollman, Portland, OR
- 2014 *An Overture to Andy Kaufman*, Frieze Projects, Frieze Foundation, London UK (cat.)
- 2013 *Andy Kaufman: On Creating Reality*, Maccarone, New York, NY
- 2011 *The House of Thought*, Karma, New York, NY
- 2008 *Busan Biennial*, Busan Museum of Modern Art, Busan, KR. Curated by Nancy Barton and Michael Cohen (cat.)
- 2007 *Prologues, Epilogues, Thresholds*, Andreas Grimm, New York, NY (cat.)
- 2005 *GONER*, Vox Populi, Philadelphia, PA
- 2004 *Souvenir*, Dance Theater Workshop, New York, NY

SELECT COLLABORATIONS

- 2021 *The Store*, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO
- 2017 *Original Sin*, Silent Green, Berlin, DE. Designer. Written and Directed by Susanne Sachsse, video by Phil Collins, music by xiu xiu.
- 2015 *The Magic Flute: An Opera In Six Steps*, 80WSE Gallery, New York, NY. Designer and producer. In collaboration with Vaginal Davis, Susanne Sachsse, xiu xiu, Jesse Bransford, Michel Auder, and BFA students from NYU's studio art program.
- 2014 *New Sights, New Noise*, 80WSE Gallery, New York, NY. Produced in collaboration with Michael Stipe and BFA students from NYU's studio art program.
- 2012 *Camp/Anti-Camp*, commissioned and presented by Hebel Theater and CHEAP Collective, Berlin, DE. Designer. Beauty Town, Commissioned by xiu xiu. Director. Film produced in collaboration with Dasha Shishkin and Jean Kim.
- 2011 *Vaginal Davis: Dejecta Protecta*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA. Designer and producer.
- 2010 *Vaginal Davis is Speaking From the Diaphragm*, Performance Space 122, New York, NY. Designer and producer.

SELECT CURATORIAL PROJECTS

- 2016 *Ellen Cantor: Are You Ready For Love?*, 80WSE Gallery, New York, NY. Presented in collaboration with concurrent Ellen Cantor exhibitions and public programs at Electronic Arts Intermix, Foxy Production, Maccarone, MOMA, Participant Inc., and Skowhegan. (cat.)
- 2015 *David Nelson*, 80WSE Gallery, New York, NY. Co-curated with Nancy Brody (cat.).
James "Son Ford" Thomas: The Devil and his Blues, 80WSE Gallery, New York, NY (cat.).
- 2014 *Learn to Read Art: A Surviving History of Printed Matter*, 80WSE Gallery, New York, NY. Co-curated with Max Schumann.
Recycling Atlantis, a live exhibition about Jack Smith by Uzi Parnes, Carmelita Tropicana, and Ela Troyano, 80WSE, New York, NY.
- 2013 *Peter Schuman: The Shatterer*, The Queens Museum of Art, Queens, NY (cat.).
DEVOTION: Excavating Bob Mizer, 80WSE Gallery, New York, NY.
Andy Kaufman's 99cent Tour, Participant Inc., New York, NY.
- 2011 *Resonate/Obliterate: Ron Athey and Julie Tolentino*, Allen Street Studios, New York, NY. Co-curated with Lia Gan gitano.
The usefulness of useless things, Fleisher-Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia, PA.

Adams and Ollman

- 2009 *Stuart Sherman: Nothing Up My Sleeve*, Participant Inc., New York, NY, artist and curator, selected for 2009 PERFORMA Biennial (cat.).
- 2006 *Where Art and Life Collide: Ron Athey and Vaginal Davis*, Artists' Space and the Siberia Club, New York, NY.
- 2005 *Founders Day: Jack Smith and the Work of Reinvention*, Grimm-Rosenfeld Gallery, New York, NY.

AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES

- 2017 MacDowell Colony Fellowship, Peterborough, NH
- 2013 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant
- 2012 Haven Foundation Grant
- 2011 Yaddo Fellowship, Saratoga Springs, NY
- 2007 Blue Mountain Center Fellowship, Blue Mountain Lake, NY
- 2006 Yaddo Fellowship, Saratoga Springs, NY
MacDowell Colony Fellowship, Peterborough, NH
- 2003 Yaddo Fellowship, Saratoga Springs, NY
MacDowell Colony Fellowship, Peterborough, NH
Millay Colony Fellowship, Austerlitz, NY

EDUCATION

- 2006 MFA, New York University, NY
- 2002 BFA, California Institute of the Arts, Santa Clarita, CA
- 2000 Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI