

ART @ BAINBRIDGE

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM

Components in the Air / Jesse Stecklow

November 6, 2021 – January 2, 2022



I wanted to activate Bainbridge House as a stage for the work to perform.

– Jesse Stecklow



Brown italics indicate excerpts from a conversation with the artist in May 2020.

Highlighting the relationships between visible and invisible components of our surroundings is fundamental to the practice of Los Angeles–based artist Jesse Stecklow (b. 1993). In *Components in the Air / Jesse Stecklow*, his first solo museum exhibition, the artist explores the individual characteristics of the rooms in Bainbridge House, outfitting each gallery with installations that interweave imagery, motion, and sound to heighten our attention to the architecture and to the ways that our personal associations, memories, and perspectives profoundly shape our experiences of space.

Stecklow’s sculptural installations intervene in the experience of each room, drawing attention to variations in the architectural, spatial, and sonic characteristics of Bainbridge House. Each work generates multiple associations with other works in the exhibition, reflecting the pathways, both rational and idiosyncratic, that shape the creative process.

1 AIR SAMPLER

Untitled (Air Sampler), 2017

Buffed aluminum, steel, piano hinges, magnets, hardware, and Carbograph 5 air sampler
Collection of Kai Loebach

The sculpture *Untitled (Air Sampler)* encases a testing device that captures particles in the air with the use of a filter. At the conclusion of the exhibition, the filter will be analyzed in a lab to ascertain the composition of the air. Stecklow’s earlier installations of air sampling devices revealed a prevalence of ethanol and corn-derived compounds, a discovery that led the artist to develop artworks based on corn, and to investigate its pervasiveness in the American landscape. Stecklow fit the air sampler into a custom-crafted, polished metal case modeled after an electrical box to draw attention to the connection between energy sources and air quality as environmental factors that are often unseen.

JS: *Often, I make work that engages its location and produces something new from it. . . . The air sampling technology I use consists of small tubes, which I encase within a polished aluminum box. It passively absorbs volatile compounds from the air around it, meaning that particles in the air flow into an opening and get trapped in a charcoal-like filter inside of the sampler. That filter goes to a lab; the lab analyzes it and sends me a list of the materials it finds. Those materials inform other works I create. In crafting works that respond to each other, my practice develops as, or in, a network of relationships. I came upon the air samplers because I wanted to pull material directly from a space that was supposedly neutral. I think it's apt for the air sampler sculpture to greet visitors since I think of it as a tool to unpack the processes in the subsequent rooms.*

2 ROOM BOXES

The three versions on view:

Room Box, 2021

Coated MDF, rubber, motor, aluminum, hardware, and timer

Collection of the artist

Stecklow's *Room Boxes* are both motorized sculptures and timepieces; they spin simultaneously on the quarter hour for fifteen, thirty, forty-five, or sixty seconds, sequentially. To mark these rotations, a small ball bounces from side to side in a rhythm distinctive to the shape of the box—a scale model of the gallery in which it is installed. Together, these periods of stillness and activation create an immersive environment that integrates visual and sonic experiences of the space.

JS: *The placement of the Room Boxes to the side of the door means that you might hear them even before you walk in. In these pieces, I was thinking about the shapes of the rooms in Bainbridge House; how was the orientation of these walls going to produce a sound? I wanted to treat the architecture of the space as a character within the exhibition.*

3 BOX SETS

The three versions on view:

Box Set, 2021

Corian, aluminum, chipboard, paper, UV print, ribbon, and clips

Collection of the artist

Working remotely to create site-specific works, Stecklow mapped the floor plan of Bainbridge House in his Los Angeles home with string. The base of each *Box Set* features an image of Stecklow's floor, onto which pictures of his sketches and sculptures, as well as fragments of the string map, are printed as raised patterns. The imagery on the *Box Sets* also includes paper dots that Stecklow and his mother, Anne Krinsky, who is also an artist, share as a motif in their work. In these ways, the *Box Sets* collapse both physical and psychic spaces: they link Los Angeles and Princeton through the layering of architectural elements, and they connect Stecklow's current practice to memories of his childhood in his mother's studio.

JS: Being at a distance, not being able to visit Bainbridge House [when pandemic protocols precluded cross-country travel], looking at it online, my experience of the house was as images. That meant a number of different things. For one, I started mapping out the gallery rooms on my floor in string and laying out segments of Bainbridge House in my living space. The process filtered into the work. I photographed segments of my floor with sketches of the works in place. These photos became the imagery on the base of the Box Sets. I think of the Box Sets as hybrids—between books, boxes, and stage models. I want them to feel like they can be quickly packed up to travel, journeying to their next location to be set up again in a new context. When you look down at the Box Sets, it's as if a section of my floor, where the show was made, has been lifted out and brought into Bainbridge House.

4 EAR WIGGLERS

Proceeding clockwise from the entry gallery:

Ear Wiggler (LEFT and RIGHT), 2015

Dried corn, drawing, aluminum, duct fan parts, modified shoebox lid, wood, wire, and timer

Collection of Ron Handler

Ear Wiggler, 2016

Dried corn, drawing, aluminum, duct fan parts, powder-coated aluminum, wood, hardware, and cables

Collection of the artist

Ear Wiggler (Metronome Light), 2021

Paper, MDF, hardware, warm and cool corn cob light bulbs, glass, sockets, aluminum enclosure, timer, and straw

Collection of the artist

The *Ear Wigglers* combine the objective data from the air samplers with narratives personal to the artist—specifically, memories of his grandfather. Previous installations of *Air Sampler* revealed various airborne byproducts of corn in the atmosphere; with *Ear Wigglers*, Stecklow uses this data as a springboard to create a sequence of associations with corn. *Ear Wigglers* pay homage to Stecklow's grandfather, the sculptor Henry Krinsky, who had an exceptional ability to wiggle his ears and who often used humor as an entry point into his artistic practice. These connections play out in the *Ear Wigglers*—they spin for thirty seconds every four and a half minutes, creating a short-cycle clock, animating an ear of corn and a drawing of Krinsky's ear simultaneously.

JS: *Corn is in our food, in the food we feed animals, in our gasoline, in our cleaning supplies . . . It makes sense that compounds from corn-based products would be in our air. I was interested in incorporating a personal component into*

the more objective data from the air sampler. I was thinking back to when my grandfather passed away when I was ten or eleven years old. I had made a drawing of his ear when I visited him in the hospital; I still have that drawing. . . . In learning from my grandfather, who made jokes in his own art, the Ear Wigglers use humor in a really direct way.

5 ANAGRAMS

The three versions on view:

Anagram, 2021

Vinyl and heat-mounted paper

Collection of the artist

An anagram is a word or phrase formed by rearranging the letters of a different word or phrase. Embracing the nature of inventive word play inherent to anagrams, Stecklow deploys his *Anagrams* as a representation of the generative nature of creativity. Beginning with “components in the air,” a phrase inspired by the function of the *Air Sampler*, Stecklow establishes the letters that he will reorder to create subsequent *Anagrams*. Each *Anagram* includes references to other works in the installation—the human “ear” and an “ear” of corn. Mining the potential of free association, Stecklow highlights the subjectivity inherent even in fixed systems, like lab analyses or language.

JS: *The anagrams are a cipher or a key for thinking about how the other works are operating. With the ear and corn content of the Anagrams, I imagine people thinking about their own bodies and listening as a form of environmental capture—that is, extracting information from their surroundings.*

Components in the Air / Jesse Stecklow is curated by Mitra Abbaspour, Haskell Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, and former Curatorial Associate Alex Bacon.

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Art@Bainbridge is a gallery project of the Princeton University Art Museum, located in historic Bainbridge House in downtown Princeton. Our main building is closed as we build a bold new Museum, designed by architect Sir David Adjaye and anticipated to open in late 2024. Visit our website for online exhibitions, videos, live programs, and more.

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COVER: Jesse Stecklow, *Ear Wiggler* (LEFT and RIGHT), 2015.
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