

Darren

Bader

Darren Bader is known for his smart, funny, and sometimes tongue in cheek work, that tends to explicitly incorporate in its creation other artists, gallerists, viewers, readers, and collectors. Darren and I met sometime between his two solo exhibitions: one about to close at the end of March in London, and another planned to open at the beginning of April in New York. We talked about what made him pursue a career in art, and about some of the aspects that make his approach to thinking about art so original: from how he uses language to address the circulation and activation of his pieces, to his views on collaboration and authorship, and much more... Darren Bader was born in Bridgeport in 1978 and lives and works in New York.

Living Content You studied film and art history. Did you have a practice as a filmmaker?

Darren Bader I studied film and art history concurrently. I had a film practice inasmuch as I was given assignments and I had to see them through. But I realized early on that film would be quite costly and I wouldn't have the creative freedom I needed. Plus, I didn't enjoy being on set so much. I'd gotten into making "experimental" film, and around the time I was finishing up school, I started getting interested in contemporary art too. So I realized that the art system was kind of a safe haven: ideas without there being financial burdens or having to deal with people

I didn't like very much, which can happen in the film industry.

LC Some might see your artistic practice in close affinity to curating. But I was reading an early interview with you where you were expressing strong feelings towards this correlation that was being made. How do you feel about this now?

DB Where was that? It's probably less so now. It depends... You know, it's interesting the older you get, the stronger certain feelings become, but stronger opinions you once had become diluted in certain ways. I suppose comparing my practice to curation is apropos, so let's say: I coordinate, I orchestrate, I direct. There's certainly a through line—even if it wasn't a conscious one—between the film studies (being obsessed with cinema) and filling a space. It's a matter of what the eye chooses to attach itself to. And I imagine that that's where a lot of curators start from: through looking. Others might start though reading, but I certainly started through looking.

LC Let's talk about the exhibition "more or less" that you opened at Sadie Coles HQ in January. Can you tell me a bit about how the show came together, and about the collaboration with artists Anca Munteanu Rimnic and Michael E. Smith?

DB Anca is a great friend of mine. She and I both use found objects and put them on top of one another, place them next to each other and... see what happens. You know...

a kind of procedure of happenstance. I met Mike a few times, I curated him once years ago, and we share a gallery in New York, and he's cool with what I do. I thought it would be nice to have him included; I pitched my idea to him and he said OK. There are a couple of other artists included... Jessi Reaves and Bradley Kronz. I knew of these works they collaborated on through APALAZZOGALLERY in Brescia, and the works had just been exhibited at Stanley Picker Gallery near London. So I included one in the show. And also a young artist, Libby Rothfeld, who shows with Bureau here in New York; she prints photographs on adhesive vinyl. But Anca and I worked closely together for ten days to create a room in which you couldn't quite figure out what was by whom. We were moving things around and we would take turns in waves. It's pretty exhausting. There was a lot that got edited out too.

LC In this exhibition, and in your work, more generally, you address collectors in a very direct way by offering them a set of instructions of how the pieces they buy can be activated or authenticated...

DB I mean, this is an important part of what I've come to do. Collectors are certainly integral to the art system and I don't believe that it could happen otherwise; I don't think that patronage would happen without there being collectors. What brought a lot of these people to patronage is collecting itself. And, you know, I worked in a gallery, I worked for a couple of artists, I learned how the system works. It was part and parcel, and it became

clearer and clearer when I was trying to see my ideas through, that there were many limitations to what can be communicated via an object or an image that requires participation. There needs to be a language. I need to address that verbally, so the collector became increasingly part of the existence of the work, the continued existence of the work. It's not simply just something hanging on a wall. I mean it can be, but oftentimes the work requires more. And so, rather than being unreasonably anal to no real end—because most of this stuff remains in storage anyway—I just took it upon myself to communicate with the collector via the written word.

LC That's very candid.

DB I try to be, but the exhibition space comes first. I present only so much information in the space, and sometimes the information presented is withheld, which somehow comes down to the written word again (or the spoken word). I mean the audience is much more important to me than the collector. The collector, per se, is something that comes after. Collectors also help make a livelihood. I've been able to support myself off my work for seven years now, but in no way do I wish to compromise the idea just to make life easy for the collector (or for myself) if the idea requires making the work more challenging, so to speak.

LC It seems that you're skilled at taking control of the entire process: of production,

presentation, but also of the authentication, and the circulation of the work.

DB That's good to hear. I certainly try.

LC And with this being said, I can see how your work can come across as being both ironic and sincere simultaneously...

DB Without the sincerity I couldn't live with myself.

LC On the exhibition window, at Sadie Coles HQ, there is a text that reads: "Need some help getting airtime on BBC Television to propose an artist residency for Henderson Island." Did anyone got back to you regarding this one?

DB I haven't heard word of it, no. Yeah, I think that would be great. I mean it would take a lot of capital obviously. But why not?

LC This project actually seems more plausible than many of your proposals for unrealized sculptures. Especially compared with the series of sculptures in space, depicted in your video work [The Vagrant ...](#)

DB I think so. I mean... one of the sculptures in space is covering a traffic signal in wood stain and then having the traffic signal somehow become some percentage wood. That's simply not possible. It's also not possible to put somebody's DNA in a black hole and have it spit out a bunch of body parts that are historically based. So yeah, sure, definitely the island can be... But

you could also put a dead elephant in outer space, and that would probably be easier than funding a residency like this

LC (laughs) ...probably. It would still be pretty expensive...

DB Yeah, maybe in the future when rocket fuel will get cheaper. Or there are superbatteries or whatever, or whatever...

LC (laughs) (...) Ok, so, altogether, as your practice looks to challenge authorship and the boundaries of the art object: why is this important?

DB It's important because in the world we live in there's no shortage of information. It's material or immaterial, or the two overlap indistinguishably in a number of ways, especially via photographs of artwork. So, to say that this is this and that is that—that this is art—it could be quite dubious. I mean, I do think that painting can be pretty confidently called art because the whole art wor(l)d arose out of defining painting and sculpture, and certain semi-antique ways of representation in the visual realm. But nowadays anything goes. So you start there... what's the difference between a painting and let's say... the coat hook over there? It depends on its presentation and its reception. So it goes for authorship: who cares who makes it? Obviously, we each, as individual human beings, care about our names and who we are because we're social. A lot of things govern us based on biological givens I suppose. But why does it matter that this looks like that, or that

belongs to this person. I would argue that it's secondary.

LC When you conceptualize a show, does writing come first for you, or do the objects come first?

DB I don't know how it falls proportionately. I certainly write a lot. I see something like that leather jacket over there, and I can find a context in which it works. So I think: "OK I will need to create a context for this object, or this group of objects, that works in tandem, more or less." That's what I do with a lot of shows: I bring a whole bunch of stuff into a space and find a way to organize it verbally.

LC Some of your works are interactive—I'm thinking here about the chess pieces that you made for Sadie Coles HQ and for the High Line in New York. How did you think of the public in relation to these works?

DB I had one on the High Line, there are two in Naples at Madre, and there were five at Sadie Coles two years ago. There was one for each day of the week. With the chess pieces I presented myself the challenge of figuring out what to make chess pieces of. One of the five solutions I came up with was relatives. So, for instance, each King has to be a grandmother, or each King has to be a son, or each King has to be a great-aunt. Not everybody's a great-aunt, not everybody's grandmother, not everybody's a son. So, you know, there are all these negotiations there: there are 32 pieces—I need 32 people. These

people, of course, are going to be interacting with the work but they're just material. People have to figure out among themselves what their relations are to people that are absent or present. But I'm completely divorced from that interaction. Whereas with the presentation in "more or less"—that was deliberately meant to be interactive. So, should you say "we present you with this information: anything here is art..." Which is the same with any show, this is what art shows are: you walk into a gallery and you have to drink the kool-aid even if you hate the taste of kool-aid. You've got to drink it. And sometimes you even spit it out, but that's really rare, the: "This is not art." With the show in London, it really depended very much on people's subjective connectivity.

LC I see, it's all about negotiating relationships and watching them play out. You also started an Instagram account @rt_rhyme. Can you tell me more about this?

DB @rt_rhyme was for my own investigation at first. I realized that people might want to do it themselves. It's not looking like it as of now, although you never know what might happen on social media. I also realized it could mean that people might be less considerate of the actual art objects than me. I'm not really going to mess around with the art object—art above all, at least that's my religion—but I'm trying to see where we go with this as art consumers. It obviously comes from language, through rhyming things. Let's say we have 'Twombly'. You say: "that's a Twombly"—"a Twombly"—it

completely objectifies the work. So you have an object that you rhyme another object with, that is signified by the capital N name. Rhyming is fun, obviously, but it's kind of juvenile. We'll see where it goes.

LC And you have publication that just came out?

DB It has the documentation of two shows I did. One is "rocks and mirrors", a show I did at Galleria Franco Noero in Turin, in late 2015, and then the show "Forest/Trees" that I did at Greenspon in New York last summer. So: rocks mirrors forest trees. Somebody wanted to make the rocks and mirrors book so I was like: 'well, can we just throw some Forest and Trees in there?' It's just a document. A high-end document.

LC Sounds great. And the upcoming show at Andrew Kreps in New York?

DB It's about words. It visually presents words. That's all I will say.

LC What would you recommend for people to see or read—perhaps something that you have an affinity to?

DB Donald Barthelme and some of Pynchon too. Pre-pomo postmodern American writers dealing with the consumerscape and the mediascape and history. They're just feeding off of all this information and creating this fascinating absurd world based on it. Also Roberto Calasso who tends to treasures quite beautifully.

NEED SOME HELP GETTING AIRTIME ON **BBC** TELEVISION
TO PROPOSE AN ARTIST RESIDENCY FOR HENDERSON ISLAND







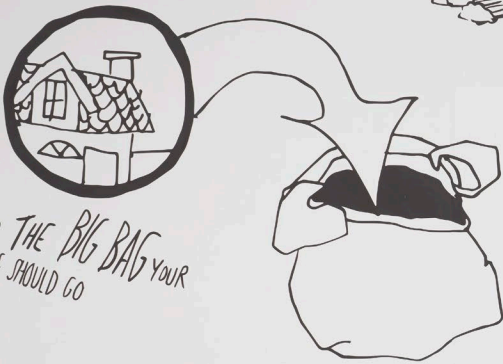


PROPOSAL FOR SCULPTURE #9

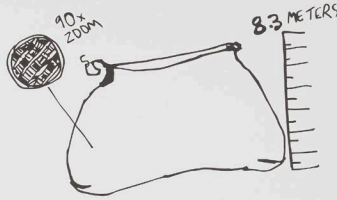
WHICH CAME FIRST
THE HOUSE OR THE BAG?



YOU HAVE YOUR HOUSE
YOU MAY HAVE MORE THAN
ONE HOUSE OF COURSE
BUT YOU HAVE YOUR
HOUSE



INTO THE BIG BAG YOUR
HOUSE SHOULD GO



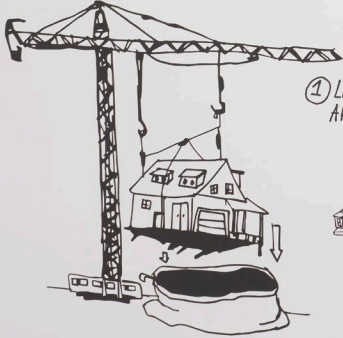
* ITS MANUFACTURER
MAY NOT EXIST AFTER
A CERTAIN NUMBER
OF YEARS



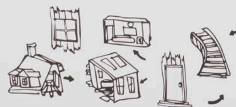
THE BAG'S
WATER RESISTANCE
CAN BE CUSTOMIZED
PER YOUR PREFERENCE

- THE BAG IS VERY BIG
- IT LOOKS LIKE MANY SMALLER BAGS
- IT'S MADE OF NATURAL FIBERS AND REACHES A HEIGHT OF 8.3 METERS
- IT IS SOMEWHAT TRANSLUCENT ALLOWING A VERY DIFFUSE LIGHT TO PASS THROUGH
- IT CAN BEAR A LOAD OF UP TO 20 TONNES
- IT IS WATER RESISTANT AND COMES WITH A 150 YEAR WARRANTY*

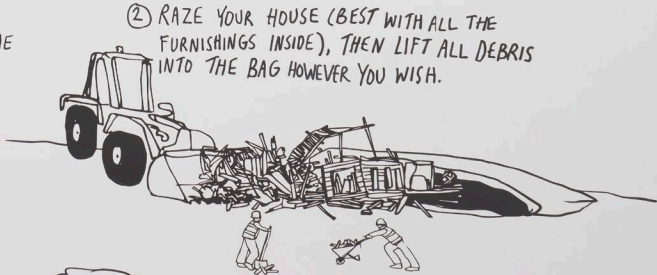
YOUR HOUSE CAN GO INTO THE BAG IN ONE OF TWO WAYS:



① LIFT YOUR HOUSE INTO THE BAG WITH THE APPROPRIATE MACHINERY*

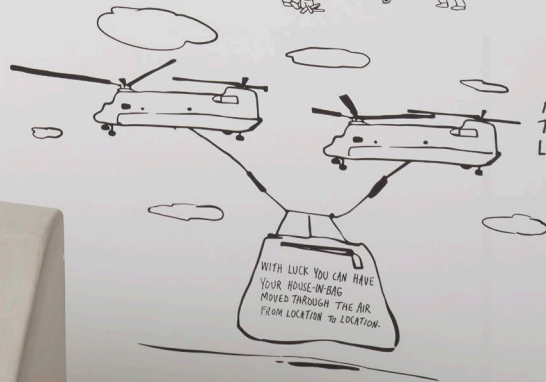


* IF THE HOUSE NEEDS TO BE DIVIDED BEFORE LIFTING (AND THE PACKING) INTO THE BAG, THAT'S FINE. ONCE THE HOUSE IS PLACED IN THE BAG, ITS DIVISIONS CAN BE REATTACHED TO MAKE IT QUITE LIKE IT WAS BEFORE.



② RAZE YOUR HOUSE (BEST WITH ALL THE FURNISHINGS INSIDE), THEN LIFT ALL DEBRIS INTO THE BAG HOWEVER YOU WISH.

ONCE SETTLING YOUR HOUSE IN THE BAG, THE BAG CAN BE OPEN OR CLOSED. YOU CAN ALTERNATE BETWEEN OPEN AND CLOSED TOO.



A FINE WAY TO TRAVEL WITHOUT LEAVING HOME

WITH LUCK YOU CAN HAVE YOUR HOUSE-IN-BAG MOVED THROUGH THE AIR FROM LOCATION TO LOCATION.

YOU ARE ALWAYS WELCOME

DARREN SARA

Sculpture 2: Joaquín Nieto Armendáriz





It is tracked for 96 years and then disappears.

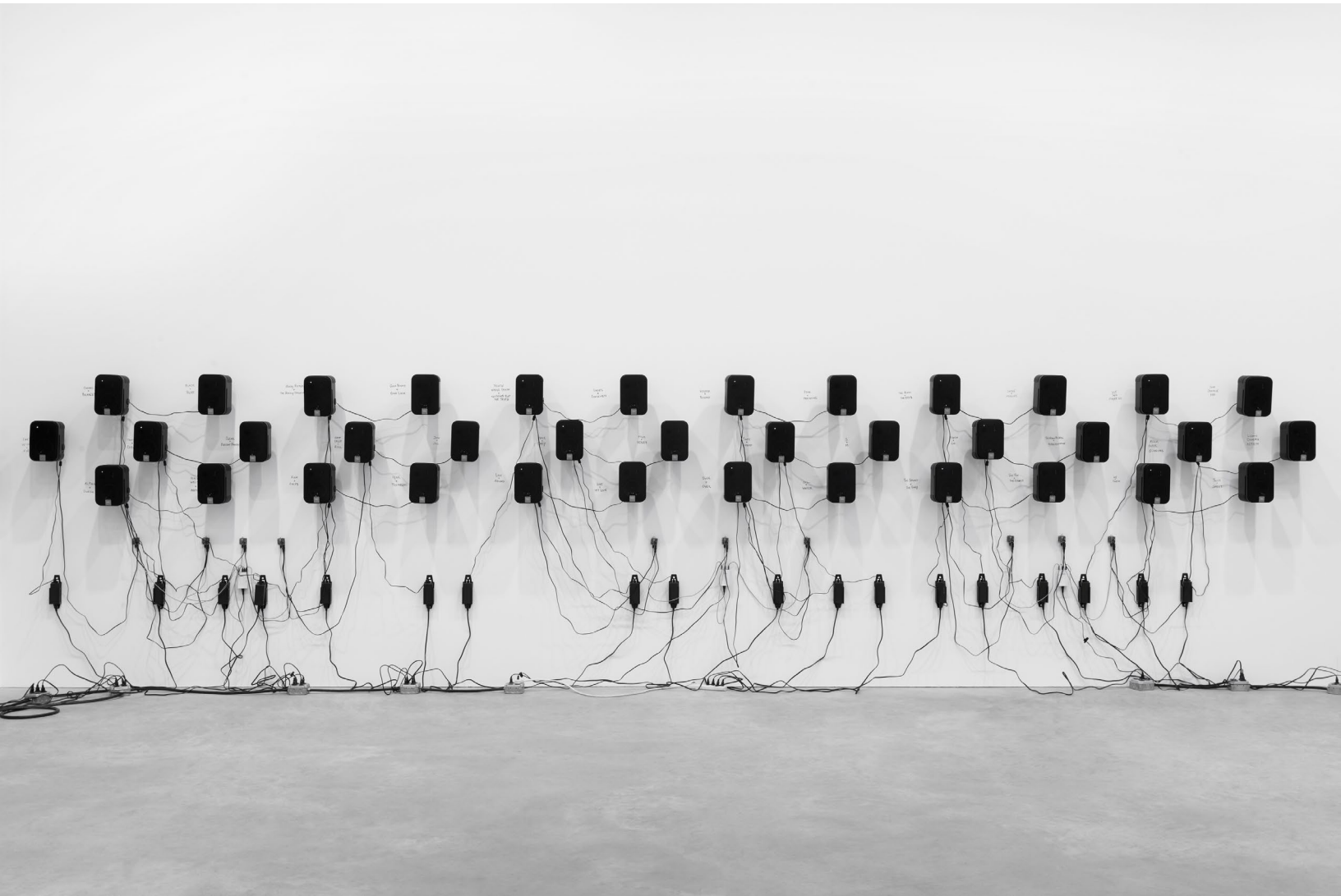


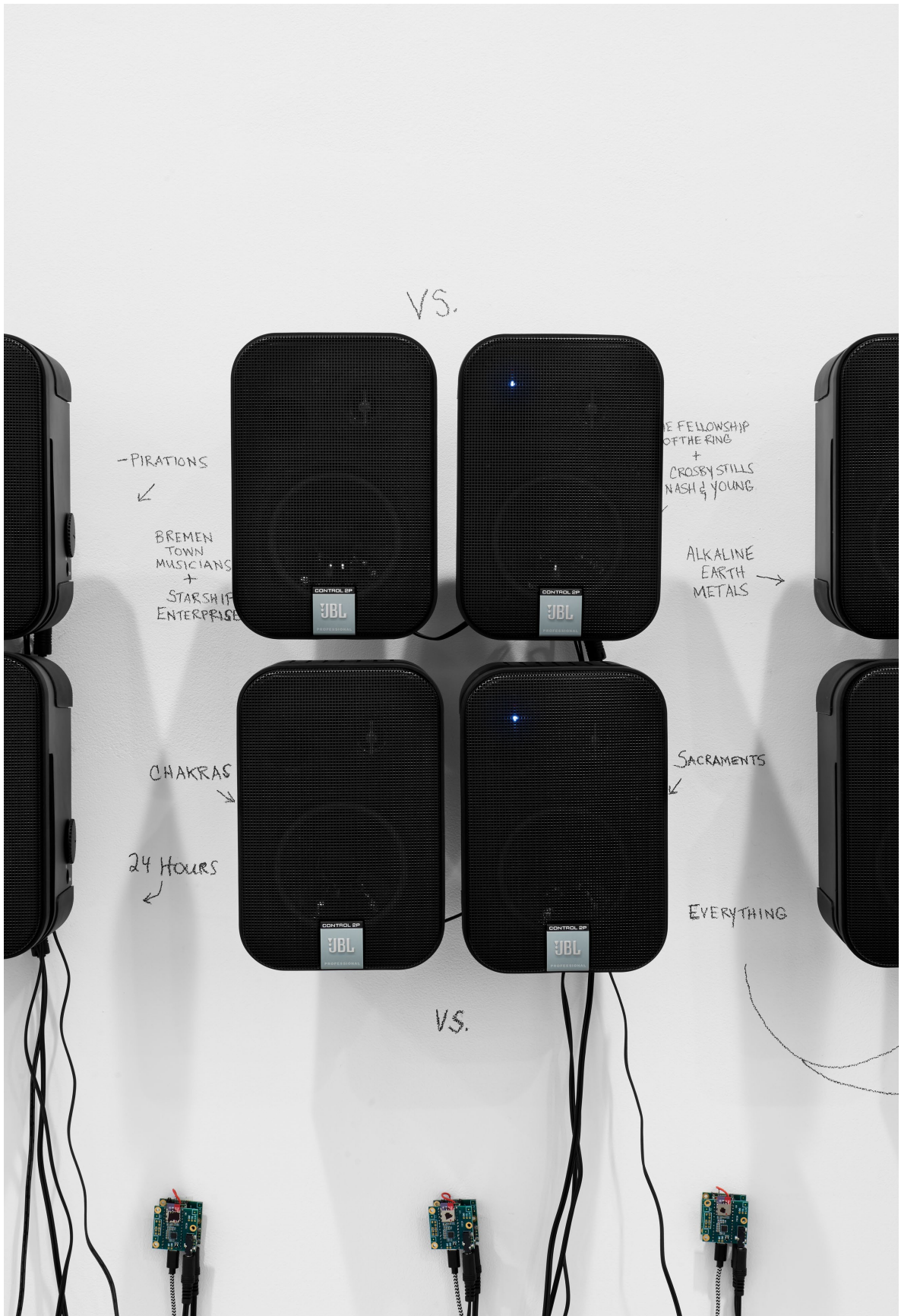
For many years, movements and sects are very invested in its return (the Oced Wall even to this day).



“It remains gone!” Octo Lemes recently declaimed.







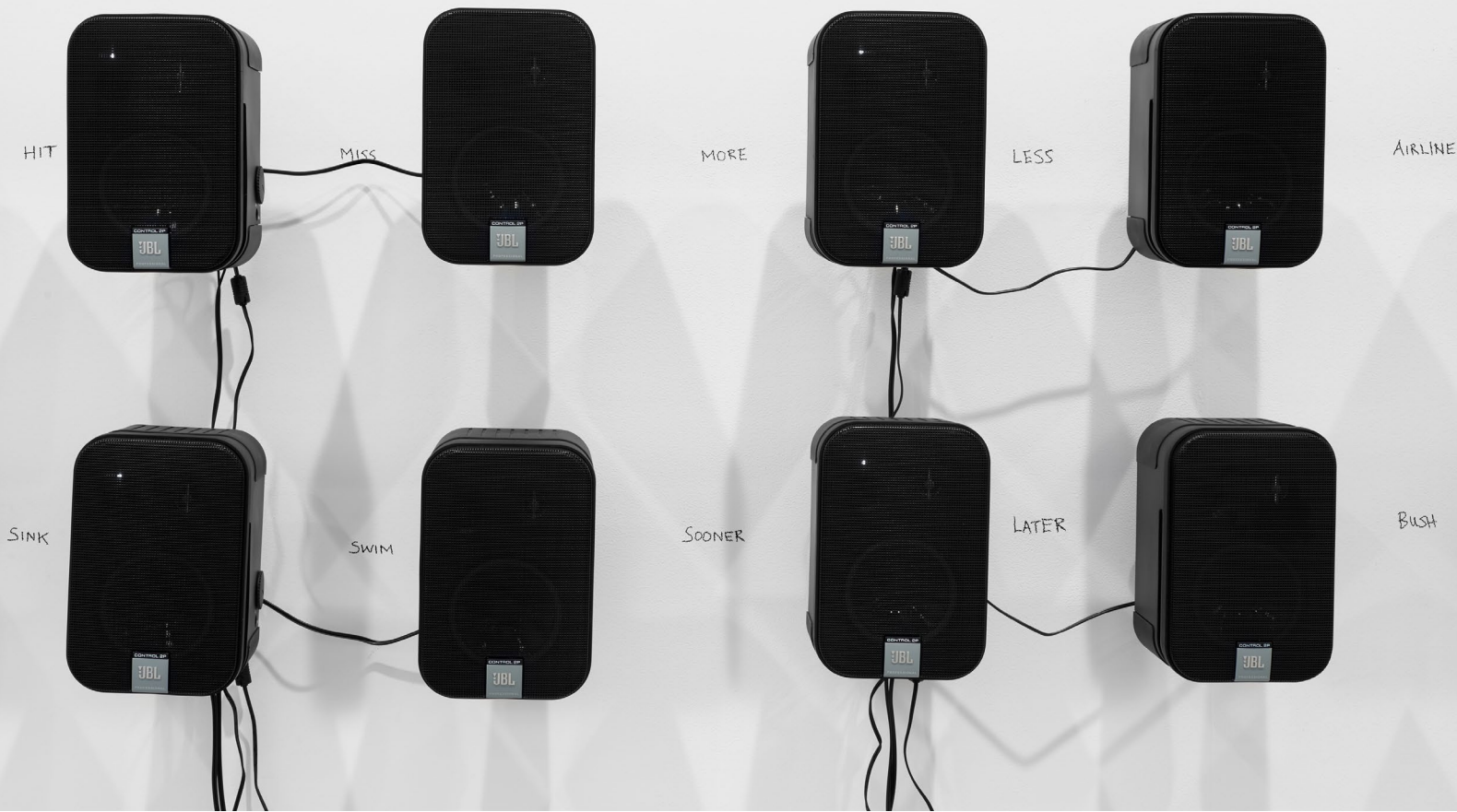














Image Sources and Bibliography

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_Darren Bader with Anca Munteanu Rimnic, Michael E. Smith, and a cast of thousands more or less, 2018

Installation view, Sadie Coles HQ, London, 2018

Courtesy of the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London

Photo: Robert Glowacki

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_Darren Bader

The Vagrant

Video, 13:32 min.

Courtesy of the artist; Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York; Sadie Coles HQ, London; Galleria Franco Noero, Turin; Blum & Poe, Los Angeles/New York/Tokyo

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_Darren Bader

Forest/Trees, 2017

Installation view, Greenspon, New York, 2018

Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York

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_Darren Bader

Sculpture #1

Installation view, Biennale de Lyon, 2015

Courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London; Andrew Kreps, New York.

Photo: Annie Dalbéra

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_Darren Bader

rocks and mirrors, 2015

Installation view, Galleria Franco Noero, Turin, 2015

Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Franco Noero, Turin

Photo: Sebastiano Pellion di Persano