

# Civilization of Happiness

— Micah Schippa-Wildfong

September 13 – November 10, 2024

MICKEY is pleased to present *Civilization of Happiness*, the gallery's first solo exhibition with Micah Schippa-Wildfong.

## CIVILIZATION OF HAPPINESS

1.

3rd September, 1775, the surgeon John Hunter dissects an electric eel. He will discover the electrophysiology of the knifefish, how it generates its electric field and how it uses this field to sense its surroundings and kill its prey. Also in 1775, the American physician and politician Hugh Williamson, who had studied with Hunter, presented a paper "Experiments and observations on the *Gymnotus Electricus*, or electric eel" at the Royal Society. He reported a series of experiments, such as "7. In order to discover whether the eel killed those fish by an emission of the same [electrical] fluid with which he affected my hand when I had touched him, I put my hand into the water, at some distance from the eel; another knife-fish was thrown into the water; the eel swam up to it ... [and] gave it a shock, by which it instantly turned up its belly, and continued motionless; at that very instant I felt such a sensation in the joints of my fingers as in experiment 4." Their research would eventually be used to develop the electric battery.

2.

On the first Sunday of 1969 Robert Barry went to Central Park with four capsules of radioactive material in his pocket. He had ordered them from a scientific supply catalog, choosing an isotope of his namesake, barium-133, the only one of twenty-two known isotopes of the element that does not dangerously decay within seconds or minutes. He walked to the Great Lawn behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art and, in two locations there, inconspicuously buried the capsules. He then snapped a quick photograph at each of the sites, leaving behind what he called 0.5 Microcurie Radiation Installation.

3.

"Might not the dancers be real puppets, moved by strings, or better still, self propelled by means of a precise mechanism, almost free of human intervention, at most directed by remote control?" In an empty music hall a man begins to conduct an orchestra for rehearsal. Down the hill slightly, in another part of the city,<sup>2</sup> a wedding assembles. The bride is solemn despite her family gathering around her. Tears wash over the lifeless statue of her body. Unaffiliated birds fly above the storehouse of her wedding. It is tradition that she will receive a white ceramic bell filled with rice and flour, which the groom's mother will later destroy in front of her. The train engine, racing as the bride's heart, pulls into the station. It is to deliver people and musical supplies. The dead horses whose hair was used to make the bows beneath which the strings have now broken, delaying the rehearsal, all trembling, and the army, now amassing around the city, administered, also from a great distance, begin their evening drills. And further on there is a hunting party. Foxes running in the snow generate an electric field. Dancers, over-articulating their limbs, generate an electric field. We have kissed beneath these paintings. Not far off, yet deep at sea, there is the factory vessel, to which the bride writes her letters. She has secretly fallen in love with the ship. Thousands of herring a day it will harvest, and be brought back to the mainland, distributed into the hungry mouths of Europe. The migratory patterns of the herring are said to have shaped the settlement, and therefore the cultures, of the continent. Herring are spotted when their shoals send up a mass of shimmer beneath the water, like reflective glass beneath the waves. The crew of these deep-sea vessels must create their own culture or risk psychosis, since they remain at sea for years at a time. A sailor must dance alone in his white metal room. Each morning the captain must assemble and play his flute to purify the air. Hence, movement is precisely determined by the information from the environment, and by the complicated interplay of material interdependencies. A painting, hung above the captain's bed, Max Ernst's *School of Herring Passing Beneath a Brown Moon*, tilts slightly in the rocking. It is said, after the great migrations, many stateless peasants were forced to Romanize their names.

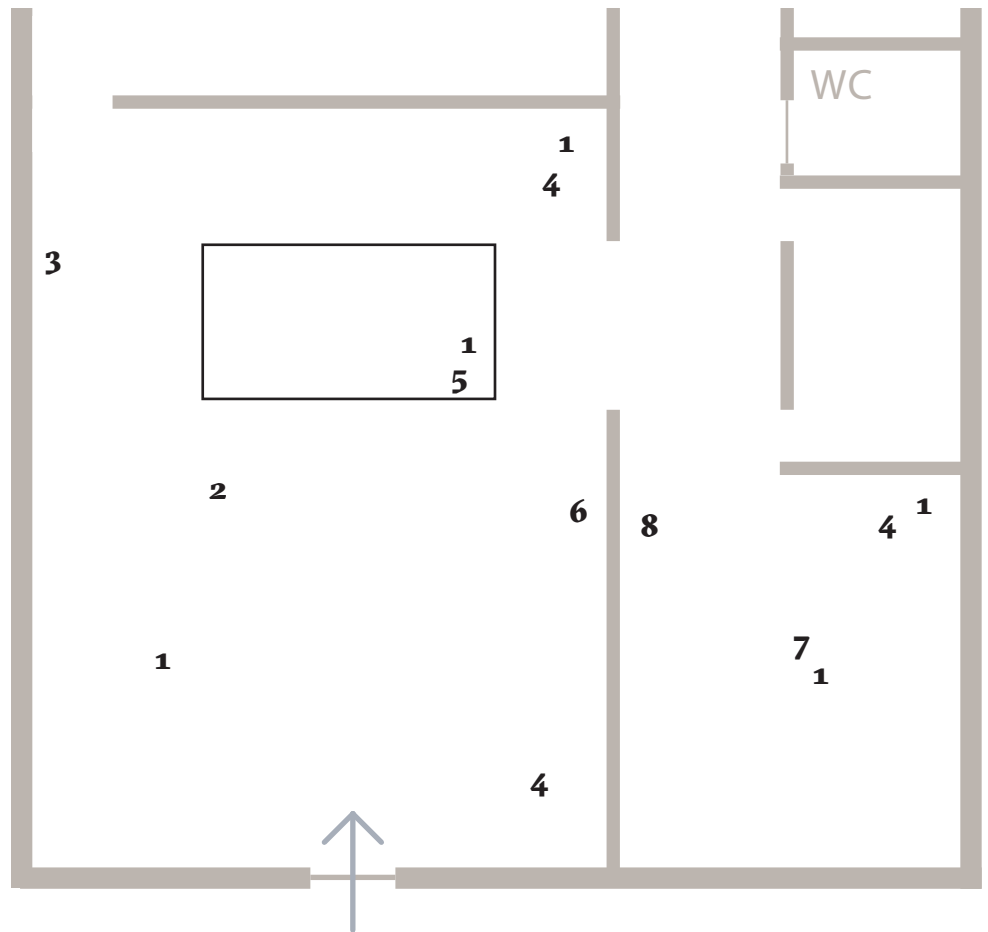
Micah Schippa-Wildfong

<sup>1</sup> Peter Eleey, "Thursday," in *The Quick and the Dead*, exh. cat. (Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2009), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Oskar Schlemmer

**MICKEY**

# List of Works



- 1 *A man must pass through his own ghost. A guest must pass through his host. To enter, the viewer must divest themselves of their flesh.*, 2024  
various glassware removed from local bars, clubs, galleries and houses, various global currencies, mass produced costume blood, vodka, hydrochloric acid, whiskey, acetone, salt water, motorcycle components delivered to artist in a plastic bin, cardboard boxes used to transport the exhibition, and paint
- 2 *Such that they have been transported between multiple locations*, 2024  
ventilation system congested with disassembled flutes to alter the air that passes through them, to inebriate any attendees, to nullify any electric field
- 3 *Continuing an earlier proposition*, 2023-2024  
clock mechanism previously dissolved in bleach in vitrine
- 4 *Proposition for Assembly*, 2024  
found objects from the collection of the artist with the stipulation that they must emit or collect light, electricity, or any other various fields, however broadly this may be defined. Objects include embalmed electric eel, whale oil lamp, fluorescent bulbs from the artist's previous studio, brass cow bell, lightning rod ball chamber to collect and disperse electricity, and shells for the making of fireworks. Objects were also collected from other artists, including small oil lamp on loan from David W. Norman and pigmented cast silicone gifted by Craig Jun Li, cardboard boxes used to transport the exhibition, and paint
- 5 *Unknown Orchestral Activities*, 2024  
found photograph after a wedding, found photograph of unknown orchestral activities, photograph on rag from *Negative Ecstasies*, found Welsh love-spoon, which is a traditional object given between betrothed couples, in vitrine
- 6 *Syntax of The Flood*, 2023-2024  
clock mechanism previously dissolved in lacrimal solution (false tears formulated by the artist) in vitrine
- 7 *Have we overstayed our party in the heavenly city or are we spilling through its gates trying not to get trampled? On the berm I filled a basket with crashing birds. In the dream you pointed sideways with your thumb where the cars were flying.*, 2024  
broken anniversary clock, pelvic bone and spine from unidentified mammals found in the Sonoran desert, broken trumpets played by the artist, lacrimal solution (false tears formulated by the artist), motorcycle components, and water in prefabricated tanks
- 8 *Letter to a fish*, 2024  
letter written by the artist to David W. Norman concerning the work and nature of this exhibition, which he was then commissioned to transcribe into his own handwriting, ink on paper in frame