

**NOTES ON SOIL THORNTON
8 HOURS OF REST**

For over a year, we've been thinking about labor, the theme of our research season at the Wattis Institute. This mammoth subject touches every aspect of our lives. Perhaps because it's so interwoven with our daily existence, even leisure feels like work now. We are all exhausted and feel burnout. We need a moment of rest.

Once we started looking at and thinking about SoiL Thornton's work, we couldn't stop—and we still can't. Rather than rewarding immediate consumption, their works create moments of pause, confusion, or delay, unfolding slowly and unevenly over time. Their language for credit lines attached to the works is clear and legible, offering insights but not answers. Throughout the months of conversations with the artist and each other, we've reflected on notions of value, decay, residue, death, calmness, rest, restlessness, life, and attention. Here are some observations.

— Daisy Nam and Diego Villalobos

between public and private life blurs, as do the boundaries between work and leisure, consumer and product. There's little room for stillness, boredom, or delay—conditions once necessary for thought and imagination to unfold. Perhaps the only space where we can momentarily resist this state is in sleep, when attention withdraws entirely and the demand to perform, respond, and produce is briefly suspended.

The first work experienced in the show is actually found at the back entrance. In a darkened room, a ninety-one-minute color video—*A year's worth of calm soothing and restful at 15 seconds a day (According to color psychology, blue is the most calming color for the mind; pink is the most physically soothing and will leave you feeling swaddled. Green, the color of nature, is the least demanding of all the colors and is very restful on the eye) (2025)*—is projected on a loop. Like a dream, we are invited into a space and state of rest. The variations of these colors (blue, pink, green) are sourced from existing digital colors in the world, from the Pantone color bank to colors of national flags, piquing our curiosity about the colors' original context. Why, for example, does a company use a certain green for its logo? Hyperattention, which can lead to restlessness, is put on pause. Instead of subliminal messages, there is a break, an allowance for freedom of thought.

We can now see what we couldn't before, like the flip of a switch, or an unconscious thought that suddenly awakens from a deep sleep within. When looking at SoIL Thornton's work, *A paws with container mediations meets applied early developmental freedom of expression (2023)*, we were initially puzzled by what we were seeing. We took a pause (as SoIL's clever wordplay in the work's title suggests), and we recognized a wooden folding dog gate, rotated into a vertical orientation and painted chromakey green. With this gesture, the purpose of the object is rendered obsolete; instead of being a gatekeeper and barrier, it serves as a backdrop for a whole new situation. Glued on the gate's surface are orange and yellow building blocks drawn from the community "free" box in Thornton's neighborhood. With this flip of orientation, we sense freedom, the feeling of child's play. These blocks were quickly glued together without a worry. The child built what they wanted, a world they imagined, and then moved on. Chromakey is a visual effects technique where the background "green screen" is digitally removed to be replaced by another digital image. You can start to imagine these building blocks with different backdrops. Could we construct a world where early developmental freedom of expression could be anywhere and everywhere?

The Wattis gallery main entrance is blocked by an inflatable sculpture, *Husband Chair (Wattis) (2025)*. Visitors are invited instead through the back door, setting the stage for the viewer to engage in alternative possibilities.

Is the blocked entrance a moment to stop and rest? How are we resting? Who is resting—is it the visitors to the show, or the sculpture itself? The sculpture's height is the exact height of the curator, and its length is in response to the length of the gallery. These measurements are related to an actual person and an actual place; they are specific, not arbitrary. All of the detail that goes into Thornton's process begins a line of questioning about the components that make up our world. How are things built, named, and used? The word "Chair" in the title suggests rest for people to sit in repose. But the sculpture refuses to offer rest in the form of seating. What is resting then? What makes us so restless? Do our minds need a break from all the conditioning we've had through school, work, family, culture, and the media? How do we assign value

meaning? These questions that arise when experiencing SoiL Thornton's work suggest that meaning is never fixed and always rooted in context and interpretation.

"Husband chair" is the name for seating in clothing stores located next to fitting rooms. This furniture is meant for husbands to sit and wait (and rest) while their wives try on clothes (another form of labor?). As wives pose in their potential new outfits, husbands may sit and approve or disapprove of these potential purchases, or just scroll on their phones. The naming of objects reveals presumed conditions: there are husbands and wives; there are patriarchs; there is one spouse resting and the other consuming. We need rest from these assumed roles, and question the limits of our vocabulary.

The history of Baker–Miller pink, which is featured in Thornton's *pink, blue, white* (2024), inspired us to do some research. Printed on the canvas is a screenshot of a square in bubblegum pink with text explaining how the color reduces our heart rate and aggression. That exact color was named after naval officers Gene Baker and Ron Miller, who worked with psychologist Alexander Schauss on a color experiment in the late 1970s. A holding cell for new inmates at a U.S. Navy correctional facility in Seattle was painted completely pink, except for the floor. Inmates were in the space for no more than fifteen minutes. The results were surprising, with far fewer incidents of aggression. Yet there have been episodes of more aggression with inmates who were held in the cells for too long. Ever since, people have been using this shade of pink in jails, gym locker rooms, and psychiatric wards as a means of control and submission. Kendall Jenner painted her living room this color since it is also known to suppress appetite.

pink, blue, white has its own cycles of work and rest. The painting is working hard for us—the viewer—as it reduces our heart rate and anxiety. It is also working when absorbing light, and resting when releasing it (Thornton has coated the work with a semitransparent phosphorescent paint that creates this process). Turn the lights off and the painting comes alive, glowing green in the dark. "BOO," reads the glyph (text + image) running at the bottom of the painting. With that scare, our heart rate goes up again. We have woken from our rest.

SoiL Thornton's works at the Wattis exist somewhere between deep attention and hyperattention.

We think of how the artist's life is reflected in each piece, allowing the works to influence one another. An attuned openness, which is a form of deep attention, can take experience and use it as material for art. But are the artist and the artwork the same thing? There seems to be a resistance to reading their artwork as a reduction of their identity, preventing the work from having a life of its own. They touch on subjects such as life and death, and the lived experience of time. Engaging with Thornton's works feels reminiscent of walking into the middle of a private conversation. However, this doesn't feel like an intrusion but more an act of vulnerability, one that sits closer to how things unfold IRL or in the digital sphere.

actualizing implications of self care through world care via capitals regenerative processes, i mean earths (2022) is a personal work. There is a purposeful act of conflation—the artist's name (SoiL) and the material (soil). The work includes a framed certificate for a coffin purchased by the artist for themselves. Displayed alongside the certificate are samples of the coffin's material (mycelium, a fungus) and a handwritten letter from Loop Biotech thanking Thornton for their purchase and for "enriching the earth for future generations." With this method of burial, the body breaks down, fertilizes the soil, and is absorbed into a larger ecosystem; nature running its course. Perhaps this purchase for a final resting place lives outside capitalist logic, as our consumer power continues to live on after death. Rest emerges as the inverse of capitalist productivity, yet never fully escapes it. Across Thornton's practice, decay is not only a biological process but an economic condition—one in which value, preservation, and obsolescence are continually renegotiated.

Life is chaotic. In his 2010 book *The Burnout Society*, Byung-Chul Han describes hyperattention as the endless multitasking produced by emerging technologies and social media, a mode of attention that is constantly scanning, switching, and reacting, rather than dwelling on or reflecting. In this state, focus is fragmented, and subjectivity itself begins to mirror the rhythms of platforms designed to capture and monetize attention. The distinction