

WILL YOU BE THERE?

EXHIBITION CATALOG

03 FROM THE FARAWAY, NEARBY

FOREWORD

In a global pandemic, it is hopeful that people become more aware of selfish actions. To be alone now equates to sacrifice. Sacrifice for the well-being of others and yourself. Even though technology and social platforms of communication such as Instagram have been caught in a washing machine of social distancing for quite a while, the meaning behind this term has altered slightly.

There is an urgency to distance now. Before, it came naturally. It was a subconscious action that was embedded within the apps or modes of communication that are practiced online. You are not talking to your friend face-to-face, but you are direct-messaging them. This is a form of communicative distance.

Today, this distance is no longer subconscious or ignored. It is a thought-out act. It is manifested from the virtual to reality and back again, where we now feel we must create physical distance and technology becomes the only way to converse. To socialize. It finally becomes the survival tool it was predicated to be. Communication so faceless is the only way to be healthy.

Distance is community care.
Distance is togetherness.

Breathe, focus.

How can you focus on what you have been working towards when your present, your presence, is at some form of risk? When time, at least in forward motion, halts? How is your mental well-being able to cope with and perform what were once normal tasks? There is now a layer, a weighted coat hugging our craniums, transferred stresses from our shoulders and back muscles: there is no clear thinking. Our subconscious takes physical form, and anxieties of the invisible shift to the forefront.

Will you be there? has become a virtual exhibition. In hopes to continue as an act of togetherness, a safe mode, each artwork expands upon these ideals still. However, their place in time has been altered. They will no longer be viewed in a tangible format, for they are practicing distance, too.

Now, a somewhat controversial question; in asking, *Will you be there?*, the curators are not requesting physical attendance at a non-virtual gallery location. Rather the opposite—an absent-presence of sorts. This title is also asking for general participation in the context of sacrifice and support. To be there has been transformed to

mean Will you stay home? Will you stay away as a method of protection? Will you be there, faraway, in aid of, in recourse to, in consideration of? Will you hold an emotional, mental, or physical weight with no guaranteed reward other than your own good health? This question reflects core qualities of the artworks, too: how a material's sole purpose is to give balance to another material's ability to stand fully and how togetherness is possible without key preconceived notions of what it means to share space. There is still an answer to Will you be there? It is still a choice in the determination of how to be and how to act together.

As the artist Georgia O'Keeffe often signed her letters while living out in the Western desolate deserts and canyons of the United States, "from the faraway nearby," we all are existing within this realm of a connection that is just that: some sort of faraway, nearby. A visible isolation, one that is adamant to hold heart.

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ESSAY

08 IN THE DARK
TIMES. WILL
THERE ALSO BE
SINGING? YES,
THERE WILL ALSO
BE SINGING
ABOUT THE
DARK TIMES.

Motto to the Svendborg Poems, Bertolt Brecht

09 AND THAT IS
HOW IT HAS
BEEN SINCE TIME
ITSELF WAS BORN:
ONLY LIFE CAN
DEFEND US FROM
THE BUSINESS
OF LIVING.

Woman of the Ashes, Mia Couto

1. Paul Chan, "The Unthinkable Community," e-flux journal 16 (May 2010).
2. Antonio Negri, *Art and Multitude* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011), 36.

Will you be there? started from an unreality, a place to look upon our current social reality by situating the perspective from outside of it. Conceiving of a model in the abstract—a concert of thought and representation through art—proves as a promising method for reconstituting prior models and highlighting unnoticed flaws in actuality.

So much has changed in the months since the co-curators of *Will you be there?* began raising questions, proffering answers, and thinking toward a possible model of togetherness. Pandemic situations such as the present one are not novel but enable newness. "To want something new is a way to remember what is worth renewing."¹ Following this maxim, with the effect of physical gatherings revoked, individual considerations might be latent with new ways of thinking, reassessing, as well as carrying along ideals worth renewing.

Now, we think of togetherness in our effort to avoid physical contact and gathering: Has togetherness become an abstract idea of solidarity in bodily absences? Big shifts did not happen only for the spatial and temporal parameters of the models offered as a proposition here. Virtual interpretations of togetherness are also now unavoidable. Digital presence and the internet provide new relations of proximity. Pressing still with the occurrence of a global pandemic, and the inescapable reality of social distancing, the exhibition's overview

spans previous and current reflections on the subject.

Together in Labor

The division of labor is as old as the invention of work itself. The implementation of collective labor differs from one socioeconomic setting to another. In working together, the mental and emotional cogs with which work progresses are as significant as the final product. But what are these cogs? In his *Letter to Manfredo on Collective Work*, Antonio Negri writes, "Actually a lot of people are coming to the view that the world is a bundle of relationships and communication, a deposit and horizon of labor activities, a network of *cooperative functions*."² The same can be said of work in artistic production.

Shared labor is the mode of working adapted by the Hermanas Iglesias—an artistic collaboration between the sisters Lisa and Janelle and their mother Bodhild. Shared labor is not always visible. In fact, labor tends to be invisible. It is felt strongly in action, yet the instant the goal has been met, the work behind it is overshadowed and no longer in plain sight. Convergences and contrasts become obscured

in the resulting product. For Hermanas Iglesias, their practice rests on an intergenerational transmission of visual languages through knitting, weaving, and the creation of new patterns. The series *Ma is as selfless as i am* (2018), included in this exhibition, is a direct example of a cooperative function of compromise: to be less of yourself in the midst of a multitude. Yet such altruism relies on a point of negotiation and the willful acknowledgment of mutual negation—one knows the other denies themselves to the same extent as they do.

Through a shared dialogue on individual expectations and interest with each work, the interplay of these deposits is revealed in their diverse visibility. When encountering the knit sculptures and paintings, one is allowed to see and be reminded of the possibility of working together despite differences.

Together in Social Imagination

In a similar vein to working collaboratively, Joy O. Ude's installation, *Pat-terning Community* (2019), assembled fifteen people to cut, iron, and sew several pieces of fabric together.

3. Joy O. Ude, "Artist Statement for Patterning Community," accessed April 1, 2020. <https://joyoftextiles.com/artwork/4631388.html>.

4. Michel Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, and Power" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 252.

5. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 231-2.

6. Brian Kuan Wood, "Is it Love?" *e-flux journal* 53 (May 2014)

7. Mark Fisher, "'A social and psychic revolution of almost inconceivable magnitude': Popular Culture's Interrupted Accelerationist Dreams," *e-flux journal* 46 (June 2013).

8. Post Museum, artist statement, *Brooklyn Really Really Free Market*, 2020.

Realizing this structure followed the collaborative tradition of quilting circles and is described by the artist as a process that is "both neighborly and familiar."³ The half-spherical, domed metal frame is covered with found fabric gathered from furniture covers, jackets, and curtains, and then patterned into sewn triangles. The social function of this installation is prescribed in the artist's invitation for spatial activation: "In keeping with this creative process, please use this space to gather, play and reflect as a family and community."³

This invitation offers a co-creation of togetherness within the installation. For Michel Foucault, space is not only a container of history, time, or a geographical location but is foundational in the exercise of power.⁴ In asking about the value of an artistic imagination, Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* reveals how this desire "leads out of what is present, out of what is close, out of representations of space, into what is further off, into nature, into symbols, into representational spaces."⁵ Indeed, a representation like *Patterning Community* is rid of any regulation with an already established space by constructing a space that is open-ended and in constant reconstitution. By committing solely to gathering, play, and reflection, *Patterning Community* embodies a distinct offering that transfers the power of co-creation to all those who inhabit it. In being here, and also considering the space

offered, people come to continuously reflect and possibly renegotiate what kind of togetherness binds them in that moment.

Together in a Non-Capitalistic Gathering

Within our capitalist reality, alternative models of affective capital have always existed in the form of love and care, given most times freely and unconditionally. In familial and Platonic love, "the currency could be a stone or a handshake—it doesn't matter and doesn't even have to be material when it's backed by bonds of trust, by family love, or by friendship. All that is capital melts into love."⁶ The world since the incidence of a global pandemic is a salient reminder of just how bankrupt society would be without the presences of love-work and care-work. These non-capitalistic pathways of being together for someone else offer "positive glimmers of worlds radically different from the actually existing social order."⁷

Of such "positive glimmer" is the *Brooklyn Really Really Free Market* (2020) initiative by the Post Museum art collective. Grounded in the motive of sharing and giving within a community, the initiative shows the possibility of

more sustainable and loving ways to live.⁸ Before the need for social distancing, the program proposed a commoning of resources in a public space. Interested residents from the neighborhood are invited to exchange goods and services without charge. Now, the current iteration, on the instant messaging service Telegram, provides a spatial simulation of the public program by allowing the exchange of intangible goods—in the conduit of communication through language, URLs, and electronic files. The nature of this virtual gathering produces a merger between a model of self-governance and an economic model of autonomy. It defies the logic of a capitalist economy in that what you leave behind might not come with the same monetary value as what you choose to take away. Hierarchies here are flattened and power is shared horizontally.

Together in Assembly

A similar yet distinct model for togetherness is embedded in the performance installation, *Cohort* (2020) by the artist collective Super Critical Mass. This sonic performance is created by a substantial number of individuals who

9. Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 108.

10. Butler, *Performative Theory*, 110.

follow a prescribed set of instructions. Their vocalizations vary between open and closed mouths, high and low notes, both individually sung and in unison. In *Cohort*, sound, space, and social relations overlap to create a temporary and intangible experience: an open, abstract sound mass that unites the many different identities of those who choose to participate and celebrates their unique vocal architectures. But the “living together” witnessed in this performance is a temporary, heterogeneous one. While occupying the temporality of this performance, participants share a common goal. But all who participate do not reach it in similar ways. The difference in tone, range, and vocal texture is not diluted into the common condition of creating harmonious sounds.

As heterogeneity is highlighted, the traditional notions of a community borne by shared histories, ethnicity, or inheritance are redefined by an assembly that represents an unusual community model constructed through performativity and choice. *Cohort* also holds the idea that togetherness isn’t always granted or infinite—in the understanding that we won’t always be here all together, an urgency to be together fully is implied.

Precarious Togetherness

From an act of coming together, one-on-one or in an alliance, we witness the intangible

mediators sustaining our social relations. Such systems—interdependence and precariousness—are visibly manifested in Kristen Jensen’s sculptures. Each work is built from materials of varying density and weight: wood-fired porcelain and stoneware are placed in the hollow of amorphously shaped cushions fashioned from worn denim and velvet shirts. In looking at these sculptures, for instance, *Heavy Makes You Happy VI* (2016), there is a tenuous feeling that evokes curiosity as to how the piece stays balanced. It is like the astonished feeling that arises when watching an object somehow balance mid-fall when it seems as though gravity should have already claimed its prize. But visible balance does not mean that the structures behind it support it equally. The sculptures provide the dichotomy of one and another, a me and you that foreground further discussion on the ethics of the bridge between these two entities.

Through Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics of the suppression of egoism based on Judaeo-Christian tradition, Judith Butler carves a further understanding of the ways in which we are entwined with one another in body and spirit. She writes, “I want to insist

upon a certain intertwinement between that other life, all those other lives, and my own—one that is irreducible to national belonging or communitarian affiliation. In my view (which is surely not mine alone), the life of the other, the life that is not our own, is also our life, since whatever sense ‘our’ life has is derived precisely from this sociality, this being already, and from the start, dependent on a world of others, constituted in and by a social world.”⁹ This unbounded individuality becomes precarious by a reverse responsibility of dependence and independence: “I am already bound to you, and this is what it means to be the self I am, receptive to you in ways that I cannot fully predict or control.”¹⁰ Consider that this state of precariousness is not pleasant. Harm and injury have been effected by it in the same way hospitality is by our interdependence.

Togetherness is consistent in its balancing act. The questions that arise once these systems of balance have been acknowledged must be directed at our social and political seats of power. To find new systems or revise old ones in order to minimize inequality and precarity that results from imbalanced systems.

11. Ana Prvački,
*Hand Pollination
Glove* (2018),
video, 01:11 min.

Together in Conscious Vulnerability

Interdependence rings truer in these times, which show us we are invisibly connected with one another. Connection reveals forked pathways, fibrous networks that extend in intricate multi-networks. These invisible threads also act as channels of communication or, in the context of the video *Hand Pollination Glove* (2018) by Ana Prvački, as a medium of pollination and cross-pollination. In the work, she states that “we must find simple and imaginative ways to support pollination.”¹¹ Attached to each finger of her homemade glove is a tiny doll hand, a multi-handed *Ganesh*, a group of miniature workers, some bells to announce the pollination, and a feather. She encourages viewers to be gentle and loving in the process of pollination, to not be afraid, to even employ coaxing through a lullaby or lore. These all point to the ways we can be responsible with *what* and *how* we transmit to one another. Individuals can be taken as agents of pollination—but not just in a biological sense of being the agents of a contagion. Across our interdependent network is a flux and flow of ideas, narratives, and habits. No single human being is ever a tabula rasa, shaped from nothing.

The decision to be together is heightened when we realize the conscious choice to allow for other presences and, by extension, for the cross-pollination of ideas that might differ

from ours. While immediate impulses to difference might be resistance, Prvački’s video taken metaphorically serves as a humorous mediation that inspires personalized ways to be open, as well as to be vulnerable.

Together as One Another

The idea of the common is a productive path in thinking against extreme individualism and its insistence on absolute autonomy and difference in that we realize how much of beingness we share with others. What is particular to us in our nature and civic duty as individuals might distinguish us but does not separate us from the common. Yet the common need not eradicate our individuality. In choosing to negotiate and contribute our obligations in a common, the self, that which makes us a form to be bound-to should not be effaced. Dani Bellando’s textile installation, *Future Ruins* (2019), materializes a model of a common that bounds smaller fragmentary units to a tangible form of togetherness. Each of the sheets is a collage of fabrics collected from differing contexts and locations.

Fragments appearing in these sheets can easily be reminiscent of incompleteness. But these fragments pieced together do not offer an immediate interpretation of un-wholeness. Ranging in color and pattern, together the rectangular sheets compose a visual harmony reflecting the disparate parts making up its whole.

The common itself is neither static nor finished, in the same manner that an individual changes. As humans living in a society that changes us, adaptation and survival can look like many things. The common thrives on this palette of diversity, but within arbitrary stipulations of how one should appear. Can the individual exist in a mode that is both bounded and unbounded to a common? Or a better question might be, *How do these multifarious personhoods exist in the mélange of togetherness?*

19 ARTISTS & ARTWORKS

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Ana Prvački

Hand Pollination Glove, 2018

C-print, 29.7" x 21"



Ana Prvački

Hand Pollination Glove, 2018

Video, 01:11



Danni Bellando

Future Ruins, (Four bed sheets) 2019

T-shirts, curtains, napkins, placemats, thrifted fabric pieces and acrylic paint on reused Bedsheets



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Danni Bellando

Future Ruins in the Wild, 2019

Video, 0:53



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Kristen Jensen

Cold Pantomime I, 2019

Pit fired ceramic, denim from two pairs of worn
pants, silk, charcoal, cedar / 20"x49"x39.5"



Kristen Jensen

Cold Pantomime II, 2019

Pit fired ceramic, denim from two pairs of worn
pants, silk, charcoal, cedar / 21"x49"x29.5"



Kristen Jensen

Heavy Makes You Happy VI, 2016

Stoneware, denim, material from one pair
of worn jeans, and metal / 23"x75"x23"



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Las Hermanas Iglesias

Ma is as Selfless as I Am, 2017
(Collaboration with Bodhild Iglesias)

Gouache and Flashe on paper, acrylic and
wool yarn, and stretcher bars / 24"x18"



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Las Hermanas Iglesias

Ma is as Selfless as I Am, 2017
(Collaboration with Bodhild Iglesias)

Gouache and Flashe on paper, acrylic and
wool yarn, and stretcher bars / 24"x18"



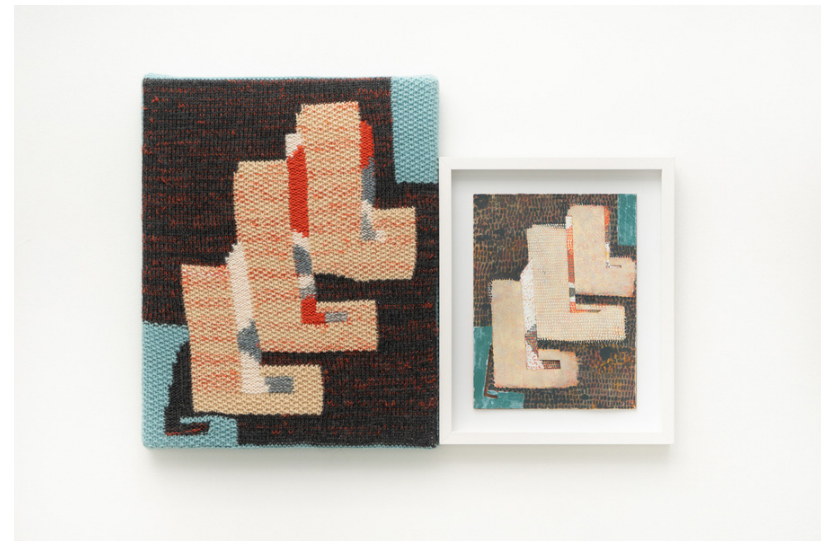
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Las Hermanas Iglesias

Ma is as Selfless as I Am, 2017
(Collaboration with Bodhild Iglesias)

Gouache and Flashe on paper, acrylic and
wool yarn, and stretcher bars / 20"x16"



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Las Hermanas Iglesias

Ma is as Selfless as I Am, 2017
(Collaboration with Bodhild Iglesias)

Custom printed fabric, foam
beads, zipper / 4'x2'x1'



Post Museum

Brooklyn Really Really Free Market, 2020

Mixed media / Variable dimensions



Super Critical Mass

Cohort, 2020

Multi-channel video



Joy O. Ude

Patterning Community, 2018

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Patterning Community was an environment inspired by the Gee's Bend quilts on view as part of the exhibition *Souls Grown Deep: Artists of the American South*. Installed in the Perelman Building, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the environment was created especially for Art Splash.

Donated and found fabrics—including jackets, curtains, sheets, and furniture covers—were used to create the 102 sewn triangles that made up the dome cover, seat covers, and coiled bowls inside. Approximately 4,000 strips of fabric were arranged and sewn referencing the Housetop and

Bricklayer pattern variations frequently used by Gee's Bend artists in their quilting.

In keeping with the Gee's Bend tradition of quilting circles, I worked with 14 people to cut, iron, and sew each quilted triangle.

Special thanks to Tim Eads, Tiernan Alexander, Terrie Eads, Alyce Graham Stiles, Matthew Stiles, Angela Schad, Kate Garman, Amy Cousins, Windy Sengsatheuvane, Jennifer Cousins, Skye Rayburn, Rose DeBoer, Chrissy Scolaro, and Kate Farqhar.

– Joy O. Ude

Donated and found fabrics—including jackets, curtains, sheets, and furniture covers / 12'x7'x12'



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FINAL
REMARKS

As a cohort, but more importantly as a group unified by the seemingly impossible task of curating an exhibition remotely during a time of global health crisis, we: Olakiitan Adeola, Isabella Anastasio, Ashlin Ballif, Angelica Maria Fuentes, David Hanlon, Minji Lee, Clifford Loh, Marley Smit, Sylvia Zhi, and Xiao Zong will like to express our gratitude to the following individuals.

Special thanks to independent curator and researcher, Noam Segal, our advisor and mentor who guided and challenged us through the making of *Will you be there?*

Many thanks to the Curatorial Practice Department, Steven Henry Madoff, Angel Bellaran, and Katreen Sorokina for the meticulous effort and support in seeing this entire project to its completion. We also extend our thanks to the technical team at Ortelia Interactive Spaces and particularly Lazaros Kastanis for your help in translating our exhibition to a digital sphere.

Lastly, we would like to thank the artists featured in *Will you be there?* for your resilience, flexibility, and commitment. Danni Bellando, Julian Day, Kristen Jensen, Lisa, Janelle, and Bohild Iglesias, Ana Prvacki, Post Museum, and Joy O. Ude.

You have answered our question: you will be there, you are here. We are here together, despite physical separation.

WILL YOU BE THERE?