

NOVEMBER

Ann Hamilton

in conversation with Nolan Kelly

AN — Ann Hamilton

NK — Nolan Kelly

Ann Hamilton is an artist best known for her installations and site-specific public works, though her practice also includes collage, drawing, camera-less photography, performance and video. After studying textile design at the University of Kansas, she received her MFA in sculpture from Yale in 1985 and became part of a vanguard of conceptual artists in the 1980s and '90s who interrogated spatiality and embodiment through large, materially heterogeneous and formally inventive installations. Her honors include a United States Artists Fellowship, a NEA Visual Arts Fellowship, a 1989 Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship, and a 1993 MacArthur "Genius Grant." In 1991, she represented the United States in the Bienal de São Paulo and, in 1999, the Venice Biennale. Other major exhibitions and installations include her museum-wide show *corpus* (2003-2004) at MASS MoCA; the site-specific *human carriage* at the Guggenheim in 2009; *the event of a thread* (2012) at Park Avenue Armory; and *CHORUS* (2018), a permanent installation in New York's WTC Cortlandt subway station. In 2021, Ann retired from her position as Distinguished University Professor in the Ohio State University Department of Art, though she continues an active studio practice.

I first met Ann in late 2022 when I attended the opening of her solo exhibition *Sense* at [Elizabeth Leach Gallery](#) in Portland, Oregon. The exhibition contained tapestry-like images of birds, rocks and everyday objects captured myopically by a retrograde scanner and printed on lightweight *gampi* paper. Endpaper collages of fabric and text complemented these works, as well as a subtle audio component of whistling. I was struck by an awareness of my body in space, the tactility of the wall works driving a yearning for touch. A rare gallery exhibition for Ann, the show situated works and themes she has been exploring for decades and served as a compendium for her recent artist book, also called *Sense*, which is [out now from Radius Books](#).

Our conversation began in person in Elizabeth Leach Gallery on November 3, 2022, and was supplemented by emails and Zoom calls that continued into 2023.

NK

Across your practice, there seems to be consistent interplay between the intelligence of language and intelligence in other forms—the body, the senses, the world beyond disclosure. How do you think about the relationship between embodiment and text?

AH

There are so many intelligences, so many ways of experiencing and understanding our experiences. When I work, I'm thinking about the capacities and conditions of being a body, though not necessarily the body's image—more, what is our experiential condition? We are corporeal, we are cells in a constant state of growth and decay. We describe and distinguish our insides from our outsides, right from left, up from down, because we're also born into the ability to language our experience. But that description is often disembodied. We know the mind is in the body, but we forget and think it exists only above the neck. The forms in which I work are my way of tactilizing words, of finding spatial relations for these dialectics and of exploring embodied intelligences.

My first hand is a sewing hand, is a hand stitching into relation. The word textile contains the word text—their's is a shared lineage. For me, quite literally, language is in and of cloth. It is thinking and feeling, abstraction and materiality intertwined. We are born into language, just as we are born into touch. Rare are the moments in which cloth is not touching our bodies.

NK

The breadth of materials you use to interrogate the body in space can be startling—they really privilege an open-ended, multi-sensory experience. When you're approaching a new project, at what point does form come in?

AH

I think a lot about how different contexts or conditions elicit different vocabularies and forms. In that sense, form is always responsive. So much of my practice has been a response to architecture, to the social conditions and histories of a place, and, however disparate, my response always carries my own formal habits and questions, even as I try mightily to leave them at the door. Always with me is the relationship between felt knowledge and language. But the challenge is how to take the obsession of one's questions and respond to very different contexts and forms, like making a book versus giving a talk versus working in a museum. Finding form, it seems to me, is really shaped and influenced by where I find myself.

NK

Your career began with your education in textiles. At what point did you scale up to thinking about architecture?

AH

That part was a very natural extension, although it was a leap in scale with ultimately huge implications. I went from working at the immediate surround and scale of the body—thinking about skin and cloth, membranes and encrustations—to reaching my hand out until I touched the next surround and container, which are the walls, the ceiling, the floor. It was a literal step from body to space, and, at first, how I met the walls was no different than how I was making cloth.

NK

So you were already thinking about inhabitation when working with textiles?

AH

Yes—inhabitation, incorporation, embodiment. Because, I mean, we are the only animal that needs clothes. Our clothing is our second skin and our first architecture. At that point, it was just a shift in scale. And when I began pressing the edge of a space, I understood pretty quickly that I didn't want to layer on top of it, but that I wanted to be "of" it, to be embedded in it, as I am in my body. At the time, that was a huge distinction and recognition. A similar moment occurred when I started [photographing people through Duraflex](#), which is this opaque membrane I'd been given by Bayer Material Science, around 2012. My way of using it came about as a result of a small associational leap. Like the shift from coat to architecture, working with the semi-transparent qualities of the membrane led to a photographic process that shifted the relationship between a camera and a subject and, in turn, gave me a new form to work and think within. I've carried that practice with me now for years. I think the hardest thing as an artist is to find form for your questions.

NK

When it comes to making a new project or working in a new environment, are there constraints for you as far as which materials to use? Do you often work out of your archive when approaching a new space?

AH

We all come to a situation with our habits of thinking to some degree, right? But I don't ever go with a material in mind, or a form in mind. For me, the site visit is extremely central and important to the work. And sometimes, there are several before it becomes clear how the project is developing, because I really have to listen and I have to spend time in the space. The hardest projects for me have been situations where I didn't have that time, or had to work in response to photographs. But I try to visit a site without too much preconception or expectation. I try to pay attention to where my attention is drawn, whatever questions or impressions it evokes—knowing that will be the stuff I will rub together to set out on the path of research that will eventually form the response. It's different in every situation. In some places, it's about understanding where the windows are and how the light moves, and in others it's what's in the archive, or what happens when I walk around the block. Recent projects that have brought me into institutional and private collections have begun by thinking about how the objects found there might become the material of the work, as with the scanners. I actually started my practice of scanning archival objects at the Spencer Museum of Art in Lawrence, Kansas, when I was working with the artist Cynthia Schira, who was also my undergraduate professor in textiles. The museum had asked us to make an exhibition together. They were rethinking the display of their collection and were in the process of bringing the university's ethnography collection into the art museum. There were obviously a lot of questions—about categories, cultural lineage, and context. Cynthia and I were looking at the ethnography collection and thinking about how some of the thread and textiles might become part of our project. Seeing some of the beautiful handmade objects, I said to myself, "These would be so cool to scan." So we went into an empty administrative office that happened to have a computer and a very old scanner, which is the very scanner I still use. We laid cloth dolls from the collection upside down on the glass and what I saw blew me away—I thought, "Oh, wow. The shallow depth of field as this bar of light passing across the object really makes it present." It transformed the object, and at the same time made it almost tactile. That moment led to the development of the project and, ultimately, to a process that I'm still very engaged with. So, it's this wonderful thing about going somewhere and really just trying to be open to what you find. You don't know that it's going to change your life. Sometimes it does. In this case, these inexpensive portable tools were a gift. They've given me a way to work in different kinds of collections and situations. They allow me to enter a conversation.

I so completely trust process, even when my thinking may be full of doubt. I know that if I stay with it long enough something will happen. The impetus for me, early on, to make installations and inhabit them as a live presence was simply a way to continue that process of making: to carry the energy of making into the ongoing public life of the work. And this is in some ways a refusal of closure, an invitation for the making to continue, to evolve, to find itself to be ongoing.

NK

What histories do you pay attention to when starting on a site-specific project?

AH

I try not to deny or erase what's already in a space. I don't want to make it into something it's not, but to respond to the conditions of what it is. An obvious early example of that for me was in Charleston. I was commissioned by Mary Jane Jacob as part of the project *Places with a*

Past to respond to the social history and contemporary context of the city. After much searching, I settled on working in a storage garage, located only a block away from a central market that had once auctioned enslaved people. It was also one block off a main street where lots of new construction was taking place, and I remember every morning hearing the narration of historic tours amplified in the streets. You know, Charleston really markets its history in a robust tourist economy. I had a strong reaction to the presence of this litany, recounting the good deeds of famous Charlestonians. I was angry. How does one begin to tell the story of everything that story leaves out? In my case, it wasn't through language, but through material and the history of the body it holds. I started assembling blue cotton workwear—shirts and pants dyed with indigo—which was the first cash crop in Charleston. Cotton, you may know, when it's not blended with synthetics, it holds temperature and holds smell. Experientially, those are not such subtle things in the humidity and wetness of a southern summer. During the installation, we worked with the garage door open, and as I was getting started on the project, some of the men working on the construction site next door came over, thinking I might be selling used work clothing. I shared with them what I was doing, laying the clothing one uniform at a time onto an enormous pile. We talked about labor history, the history of indigo, of the color blue. I think they were dumbfounded, in some ways, that my task had no obvious function and that I was not doing it for pay. Two of the men actually returned and once or twice helped pile and smooth the clothing. Although it went unspoken, I think they sensed a recognition, and perhaps an honoring, of their work. Amazing things happen when you work in public. Conversations happen because you're there. The processes of some of these large projects are inherently social—the work is a way to be in the world.

NK

Have you noticed a change, institutionally, in how you're able to take advantage of that? How do you think this kind of socially engaged work has changed over time?

AH

My practice has always been responsive—it's grown from and been dependent on my collaborations with curators, institutions, and the programs I am working with, and that continues, but the opportunities to make new large-scale installations have changed. The atmosphere is more conservative, the regulations are tighter. The work's duration, process and scale can push and make demands on institutional structures, and while it is a process I love, it isn't for everyone. The work asks a lot.

NK

Especially if it involves dealing with some of the unspoken or unadvertised parts of that building's history.

AH

I don't feel like that's ever been an issue, but I do think about how a work makes present what's already there but is perhaps not already open to experience. It has a politic, an ethic, a poetic. In 1998, I did a piece at the Aldrich, before they expanded with a renovation and an addition. The project allowed me to respond to the history of that house as a post office, as a church, as a school—it got into the history of New England and the Antinomian Controversies and more. It was just a great situation. We were able to cut holes through the floors and walls and install a cable that carried a white cloth, animated by movement, through almost all of the rooms in the house. We cut an eight-foot hole in the floor and reinstalled it as a spinning platter. And, you know, those are pretty unusual circumstances. I remember when they were renovating, Harry

Philbrick, the director at the time, said that they used that project as a benchmark for the kind of flexibility they hoped for in the new building. So, spaces that have social histories before their life as an art space or a museum, those are circumstances I'm drawn to. A white box museum or gallery is so much harder for me.

NK

That gets into some of the politics of the white box gallery as a form of erasure. I find it really interesting that that's our paradigm now. On one level, there's the logic of a minimalist design meaning nothing in the room will get in the way of the art, but it can also make the space feel like a non-space, lacking locality or historical specificity. A lot of work is done to make the gallery or museum today seem like as much of a blank slate as possible, which strikes me sometimes as almost a fear of history.

AH

You can't really erase context—the “white cube” is itself a context. History contains generations and layers of erasure and loss, but our present is haunted by what has been suppressed. Don't get me wrong—I love big white empty spaces, but it is much harder for me to figure out what to respond to in the context of the white cube. Sites with histories of labor and social use have been a more natural home for me, they're the kind of spaces that have really tuned tempered and shaped the work.

NK

And for at least the first decade or so, your presence was a pretty integral part of whatever happened in that space. I've been thinking a lot lately about the artist's body as a tool. Going back to some of those histories, I've been realizing how much things since the '90s have shifted back to a much more object-oriented ontology. There's [a *Times* article from 1997](#) that talks about your work alongside that of Matthew Barney, Kiki Smith, and Robert Gober as this counterweight to the market-driven art world of the '80s, and the kind of performance work that came about response to the AIDS crisis, when the body really became one of the artist's most important tools. Do you feel that the pendulum has swung back since then to objects?

AH

I see a lot of performance that is still carrying that forward. But I do think that the idea of art as a thing that circulates independent of the body is very present, especially in New York.

NK

Has that affected your way of working?

AH

I don't think so much about it, but I am acutely aware of how the structure of arts institutions are, for the most part, set up to show and house objects whose form is fixed and at some level portable. My work is so often not in the objects themselves but in the relationship between them. I always want the work to evolve and change. As a consequence of the scanning and other photographic processes, I've spent the last several years doing more image-based work, and it's been important to me to find means for that to circulate in a non-precious way—in many cases, through the mail. The Duraflex portrait series became a series of phonebook-style publications printed on newsprint, which were given away as part of the project. My work has always been very material—it's been made up of things, but because I think relationally and spatially, making and trusting the presence of an independent thing outside of a

context has been an enormous challenge for me. It can be hard for me to classify, sometimes, what I'm doing and how I think about it. But I love making books. Books are independent things, they're portable democratic objects. When you hold a book in your hand you determine the pace and duration of your attention. I loved working on *Sense*, thinking about sequence and duration, imagining it as a film, playing with color. The immersion in a book is not so different from that of an installation.

NK

Absolutely. One of the difficult parts about discrete objects is that we ask the materials to hold up in whatever context they're placed in, and as an artist you have to cede control over that context. Are there materials that you feel stand up to that challenge? I know you've worked a lot with gampi paper lately.

AH

I don't know—perhaps that challenge is more a matter of form than of material. Some of the materials I'm drawn to are delicate, so they age and will need care over time, though probably no more than normal. I like understanding material processes and social histories, and have always worked with familiar materials: paper, cotton, raw sheep fleece. I've worked with live sheep too, of course. Most of my favorite materials muddle the difference between something grown and something made. Gampi is a plant and a paper that I love. It's a long fiber and the paper it makes is tissue-thin but very strong, and somewhat transparent with a sheen. It holds an image in a particular way. Right now I'm having a hard time getting the paper because of climate change. It comes from Japan and I've learned that the plant is more scarce now, since the harvesting is more difficult and at higher elevations. Actually, I just got an email from Hiromi Paper—they're looking for a solution for me, because the papers we have been able to find recently don't have the same sheen or hand as the works you saw in the gallery.

NK

That's interesting. You have to deal with the natural constraints of some of these materials.

AH

Sometimes sourcing material—an acre of linotype, or the horse hair from *tropos, my project at Dia*—can be a challenge in any quantity. It's also interesting to find how unfamiliar people can be with material histories. Horse hair, like language, grows from the inside out. It carries cellular memory, and at Dia it was an oceanic expanse, sewn into a giant carpet that covered the entire floor. I remember a journalist coming in soon after it opened, walking across the hair, not really looking around, and asking me, "What does the horse hair mean?" And I just remember thinking, "What do you mean, 'What does it mean?'" It's more like, "*What is it?*" I think about how ingrained our habits with art are—instead of looking at what and how something is, to think outside the work so quickly. One of the goals of the work I make is to try to invite you to join it; to be in it long enough that that habit of mind might loosen.

NK

Yeah, I find that a lot of your work turns attention back to these elements of corporeal life that we often take for granted. Everyone has a body and everyone has been a body. But we don't tend to privilege that experience.

AH

We often lack language to describe it. At its best, I think that the felt qualities of the material elements creates an atmosphere of relations. They are simply places to suspend, to spend time, to *be in*. A friend of mine, an artist I was working with in China, gave me a book about atmospheres in architecture. I loved how the writing sought to establish a vocabulary that values the feeling of experiencing a space. I'm interested in giving more value to that intelligence and the qualities of felt experience, especially in a world so dominated by the over-valuing of information. I arrive at my work through associational processes. A huge help for me in thinking about how we conceptualize the role of emotions in our thinking has been the writing of the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio. In his books, *The Feeling of What Happens* and *Descartes Error*, Damasio writes about the biological processes of cognition. We know that the model of cognition described by Descartes is not really how we all experience the world. We think up through our feet and in through our hands. We think through our whole selves and yet we seem to privilege language over other forms of knowledge—those experiences that we sense, those experiences that might resist language.

NK

It seems to me that animals come up a lot in your work as a way of pointing toward those alternative ways of being.

AH

Not as alternative ways of being, but companion ways of being. I've worked with sheep and with birds: pigeons, canaries, peacocks. In the work, they exist not as symbols but as themselves. For the Armory project, I was thinking about how we are a species with weight and birds are a species without weight. Initially, I was inspired by the navigational skills of homing pigeons traveling great distances and delivering messages during war and peace. I had aspirations that we might raise a flock of pigeons that would fly from the Armory at night to roost in another borough and return to be read to during the day. Obviously, that was a complication beyond the scope of the project, but thinking about forms of intimacy that link the near at hand to the far away, it did have an influence on the decision to ask people to write letters on airmail paper that addressed the qualities of the space. There are many materialities and mutualities that connect human animals and non-human animals in the work. Even back to one of my earliest projects, an installation with three sheep looking across a sea of pennies, I was thinking about economic relations and value hierarchies. The relative value of a copper penny sitting in relation to the bodily presence of the living sheep: how to compare or reconcile the abstract and the actual. I've actually never said this before, but I do think of certain aspects of my work as more like epics. While my work is not overtly narrative, the relationships of the parts to one another and to the space have a material narrative that point to our condition as a species. The theater director Anne Bogart and I hope someday to work together on an opera, which is truly an epic form. Its themes can manifest in different clothing, across different generations, but it takes up human drama and subjects that endure across time. What is living? What do we consider animate versus inanimate? Addressing these questions is historically charged, and changes over time by what science continues to reveal.

NK

Taking time for the unspoken or the unspeakable really is a job for tragedy. I think so many ancient myths stick around because we're constantly in need of reminding, as language continues to fail us in describing what it's actually like to be a person.

AH

In that vein, a friend of mine introduced me to *The Craft of Zeus*, which describes how the weaving and spinning of threads in classical myths both enact and symbolize social relationships. I love noting how often textile metaphors are evoked to describe social metaphors, grounding them in materiality. How do we describe the intelligence of what a hand knows and senses when it touches cloth? I think a lot about forms of knowledge in relation to technologies of information. We have so much information—we're drowning in it—yet information alone is not enough. If it was, we wouldn't be where we are today.

Our cultural habits privilege and value certain kinds of information over others; we tend to privilege naming over sensing, speaking over listening. One might say that one of the projects of my work is to invert these hierarchies and, as a consequence, the work is slow. Making a show that's very still, like this one at Elizabeth Leach, is the point. In the gallery installation, there's a whistling record playing that may slow the pace of one's attention. It makes more space for feeling what you see and hear.

NK

I'm interested in this idea of returning to focus in a media-saturated world. I wonder if you feel like the stakes of your practice have changed as information and digital culture have taken over.

AH

Your question makes me think about how to participate and also how to resist. Of course, my work has spanned an era of unprecedented change. I mean, when I was your age, images were slides, they were printed on film, and it was all material. The materiality of an image is something I think about a lot and is important to me. The revolution of the iPhone and its instant connections didn't exist. I remember the international phone we rented when we were working in Venice in 1999. It was the size of a box! We were communicating by fax on paper and even that seemed like a miracle. So, yeah—we make technology and technology makes us. The form of my work has been shaped by intersections of the analog and the digital. The qualities of an image, its materialities, are so often a consequence of technologies that are passing out of currency, but also are only possible because of the digital tools we have today. So, for example, the shallow depth-of-field, early-generation flatbed scanners I use make a particular kind of image that is particular to the intersection of this tool at this moment in time. I also use a wand scanner, which is an over-the-counter device for copying documents. With this cheap portable tool, each passage of light over a three dimensional object is a trace and a drawing that can't be repeated. Even in my early video work, I was using inexpensive, single-chip surveillance cameras, because they had the same focal-length constraints. The only thing you could adjust was the focus. I would read with them and the letters and words would fall in and out of focus with the rhythm of the hand's motion. It's always about bringing the body back into technology. Tiny, handheld—the hand, the breath, the body, intersected in images that I can't replicate with more recent and improved devices. So what is the reciprocal relationship between our bodies and our tools?

Actually, an early video of mine, a really foundational piece for me, involved drawing a line. I had a pencil in one hand and the camera in the other, and the pencil was just a little ahead of that tiny camera. So the video documented this space between two hands traveling together in time. One hand was marking, and one hand was recording. The shallow space between them made a rhythm, falling in and out of focus. I don't draw so much on paper, but I understood this as a form of drawing, the endless possibilities in the intersection between a camera and a pencil. My work emerges from paying attention and recognizing the moment when something materializes.

And what gets me excited when I work is when I find a process, a tool, a material, that I can get lost in, that invites immersive attention, that can evolve and become a form for thinking. Often it is accidental, like finding the scanner.

NK

What has always really impressed me about your work is the fact that you've been able to find these intuitive forms that are also totally your own. By following your instincts, you've arrived at these really unique ways of creating images. In that sense, it's interesting that you continue to bring text back into your work, and in doing so you point to how operationally different it is compared to image.

AH

Words are material. They are made of letters and sounds and, like structures in weaving, they can be made to do different things. Much of my work with texts is literally a form of weaving—a line of writing crossing another line of writing, like two threads crossing to form a concordance. I like to see what emerges from a non-narrative compositional process, to see what happens when words are shaped with the same hand I might use to transform or manipulate other kinds of materials.

I still have boxes and bags of cut-up books I've saved from [the Guggenheim project](#), and I am completely and totally engrossed in pulling a pile from the bag, sifting line by line through the fragments, finding phrases and words from the chaos. The process is responsive to what I find, and in time, compositions emerge. Though they differ in scale, it's the same form of attention I try to practice when I respond to a space or an object. Perhaps you could call it an attention of possibility.

Anyway, the words and fragments fished from the sack meet on endpapers with fragments of cloth that have also accumulated in the studio. A particular phrase with a particular quality of printing finds a relation to the shape, color, and texture of a particular fabric on a page that is yellowed and edge-turned, and when they sit together in a “just so” relation, it forms a recognition I like to think of as a kind of touch. I love the modesty of these collages, their humble materials, the lack of production that's involved in making them. And a little goes a long way. The ethos of one's practice is in the “how” of how it is made, how it circulates, and the relationships it invites. My ethos involves work with the conditions at hand, with what's possible within the circumstances whether that is the scale of my lap or the scale of architectural space; one is an address of a single hand and one is an address of a collective hand. There's always an element of time exerting its pressure, but for me the core of my practice is about finding processes that make spaciousness. The work comes from those moments and recognitions that well to the surface when you're not really *trying* to do anything. If I don't pause, if I don't listen, if I am too focused on “getting there,” nothing happens. Work comes from making work and from being inside it, but if I cannot be inside myself—if I am not paying attention—again, nothing happens. It takes patience. It takes forgetting yourself.

NK

I love getting to that headspace. One of my favorite things about collage is that once you start working, you don't have to think you're doing anything special. And then you find out that suddenly something has appeared there.

AH

Exactly! And you're like, "Oh, oh, look what happened," Right? It's really special. And we live in a collage era. Everything's increasingly fragmentary, and those fragments are smaller and smaller. So having the presence of mind to put them together, just to explore how they combine, that has never been more important. Though not new, it's a form for our time.

NK

Who were you paying attention to when you were just starting out?

AH

After coming out of textiles in Kansas, I was living in Canada, and I was exposed to a lot of conceptual work through the program at the Banff Centre. And then when I was in graduate school we were near enough to New York City that I could visit frequently—I could see shows, or shop Canal Street. I saw many of the productions at BAM's Next Wave Festival. I got to see Robert Wilson and Pina Bausch, and was completely taken in by what was then called Visual Theater. That was a big influence. My impulse for work to be live, to occupy and inhabit its space, came from those experiences, and was then married with my wanting to extend the process of making into the public life of a work. But at that point, the idea was still being developed, it was all still very nascent. I remember being very confused about the form, what exactly to call it. Because I see my work as more of an inhabitation than a performance.

NK

Right, performance implies a certain separation between the audience and the artist. I agree that what you do is a lot more collaborative than that.

AH

I'm not sure it's collaborative, but the installations are an invitation to join, to enter, to come into the atmosphere of its relations. That thinking kind of clarified for me when I was working on the project at MASS MOCA, *Corpus*. It was the first time that I understood that the central figure of the work wasn't necessarily the elements making up the work, but the people visiting and moving through it. That recognition opened and loosened the work, moved it out of the earlier tableau-like quality.

NK

Was that one of the first exhibitions that didn't involve you being somewhere inside the piece?

AH

It probably wasn't the first. But because *Corpus* was a multi-room installation with a long hall and a back room upstairs, I started to understand that the core of the piece was in how it orchestrated and held movement. Like the public works I'm doing now, they're meant to be experienced in motion. At MASS MOCA, blank white sheets of paper fell from the ceiling, a corridor of raising and lowering speakers formed a passageway, and walking through it, your attention was turned by the voices from the speakers, the light streaming in the windows, the paper falling and the paper accumulating underfoot. When you arrived to the back room it was very, very dark, and the spinning speakers overhead were circling around you instead of you passing by them. And I remember feeling like, "Oh, this piece exists in the shift from walking through to being held by sound." And then upstairs, following the roving light of a projector with your eyes. The movement from walking to standing to following with your eyes is the piece. I

don't think anyone else would describe it like that, but this is how I came to understand that the figure of the work is the bodies of the people who walk through it, who are in there.

NK

That idea of moving speakers—but more generally of the centrality of the audience's role in the experience—reminds me a lot of seeing [Ann Imhof's show, *Nature Morte*](#), last summer at the Palais de Tokyo. There was a main entrance, but beyond that where you went in the space was totally up to you, and it went quite deep into the bowels of the building. That show was a lot about performance and the feeling of using space as a staging ground for something, especially something subversive, even though there wasn't an active performance going on when I visited. What was so interesting to me was how, in the absence of some main event, I became so aware of the other people just existing with me in the space. I think about this a lot when going to raves or bathhouses—anywhere that's really oriented towards the body, but is also shared, it often feels subversive because that kind of experience is so unprioritized. We're taught to be very private with our bodies. So if you spend enough time there with other people, even if they're complete strangers, you come away with a sense of affinity from having shared this experience.

AH

Don't you think that's why going to the cinema in the theater is different than staying home and watching? Because it's something that's happening to all of you at the same time together, even if you never speak. In *Crowds and Power*, Elias Canetti writes about that, about the intimacy of sitting in a theater. You admit to a kind of intimacy that you wouldn't tolerate in other circumstances. That's really interesting to me, allowing that kind of intimacy in public. Where are those opportunities for a non-sexualized intimacy, and what does that have to do with civic space? One of the ways I used to describe the Armory show and my experience of it was that it created conditions for being alone together. I think that is also what happens in the cinema.

NK

What's interesting about the cinema is that the metric is proscribed, it's edited in and so the experience of being there is very passive. Whereas, for something like your project at MASS MOCA, the metric is really in walking. It's about the viewer's own direction and pace. And so it returns agency to the participant and to the body.

AH

That's exactly right. And that's essential to these public pieces, like the piece at the World Trade Center subway, or the piece I was just working on in [San Diego](#), which is opening in April. The new project, in the Stuart Collection at UCSD, is an 800 foot long stone walkway of words in relief. Standing on the threshold, looking across, you see only texture, a sea of words. But when you look down, individual words and phrases catch your attention, perhaps slow your pace, become a composition as you walk its length. In this way, the work is alive and changing, even if the stones are static. The piece is just a structure, a woven concordance of multiple texts animated and recomposed in each crossing. So, if each passage is a new composition, it maintains an openness, has an ongoingness, is never finished, is always being re-made. Perhaps this is not so different from the presence of an attendant figure in the early installations. Re-animating—returning time to something fixed in time—is something I think about every time I visit the Met. These historic objects are re-animated by time, and by every viewer.

NK

You can never come across the same piece twice.

AH

Exactly. It's alive.

Ann Hamilton: Sense

DEC 22–JAN 23

By Nolan Kelly



Ann Hamilton, *Side-by-Side · Ivory Figurine I*, 2018. Archival pigment print on gampi paper, cloth backed, 78 3/4 x 102 inches. Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

Elizabeth Leach Gallery*Ann Hamilton: Sense*

November 3 – December 30, 2022

Portland, OR

For much of her career, Ann Hamilton has focused on cultivating environments that reorient the attentions of the people inside of them, providing sensual, probing focus to the textures of everyday life. Her landmark exhibitions at the Guggenheim, Park Avenue Armory, and Seattle's Henry museum often involved carefully orchestrated sounds and smells in addition to live performances and site-specific impositions that transformed galleries into chthonic chambers. But the drawback of installation art is that it does not last. Live canaries, candle-licked walls, floors of struck pennies, and piles of neatly folded clothes make for a sumptuous sensory experience when placed in concert, but transform back into common objects outside of Hamilton's constellated effect. The problematics of iteration go beyond simple logistics of site-specificity, or even the marketability of conceptual art, to the heart of human attention and its capacity for embodied presence. Still working entirely with everyday objects, Hamilton's recent work has seemed less interested in exuberant combinations than in quiet contemplation, a way of winnowing a transcendental experience down to its core details.



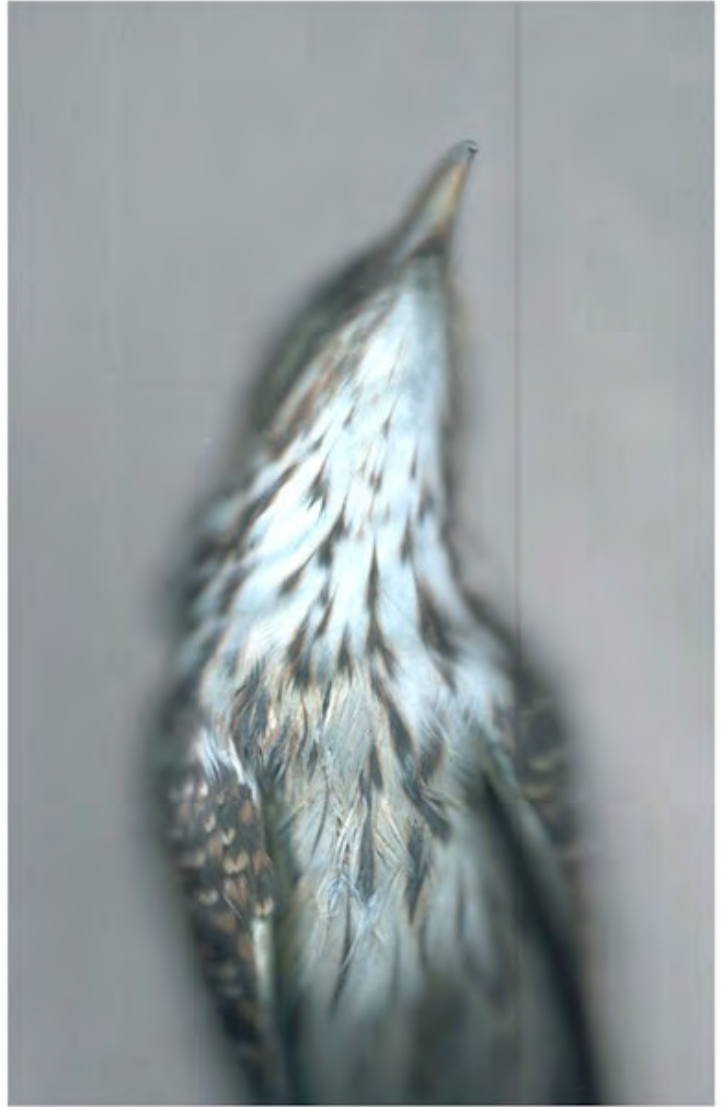
Ann Hamilton, *sense · bur oak leaf*, 2022. Archival pigment print on Japanese gampi paper, 49 1/2 x 32 inches. Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

Hamilton's solo exhibition *Sense*, at Portland's Elizabeth Leach Gallery, finds the artist utilizing these everyday items to increasingly sophisticated ends. Where once the coordinated sensations of a Hamilton exhibition depended on the interaction of so many elements in space, her new work increasingly turns toward making embodied experiences from static imagery alone. Thirty-one large photographic prints made between 2018 and 2022—of leaves, rocks, textiles, and animal "study skins" from natural history museum archives—hang like tapestries throughout the gallery, carefully adorned on metal rods. Printed on tissue-thin Japanese *gampi* paper, they are light enough to be swayed by a breath—a fragility that inevitably brings attention to one's distance

from them. In a palimpsest of texture, images of these objects are printed at such proximity as to dissociate them into a parade of small details. A study skin of an American golden plover might be seen first as an accumulation of spotted feathers, before cohering into a recognizably avian shape—a startling reversal of the way we usually see. Hamilton photographs these objects using flatbed scanners or handheld scanner wands—two slightly outdated imaging technologies that impart a remarkably shallow depth-of-field. Only the parts of the object that directly touch these scanners slip into their dazzling, myopic focus, while those that bend away even slightly get lost in a greyscale mist. The result is an image that ingeniously approximates touch.

The artist's ability to develop an intuitive alternative to typical photography, one that naturally corresponds to themes she has previously explored in performance and object arrangement, is the great triumph of Hamilton's present career. Though technically photographs, Hamilton's scanner images have little in common with much contemporary photography in that her pictures are non-narrative; rather than unspooling meaning from a specific moment in time, her works instead attempt to capture a specific object in space. Her photographs thus resemble sculpture more than text, and yearn for a similar tactility. Because touch, shared between object and scanner, is the genesis of visualization here, it creates a comingling between these two senses that in turn impacts the sensory circuitry of the viewer.

Images and scans from this series of everyday objects also make up much of *Ann Hamilton: Sense*, an artist book that will be published by Radius Books in early 2023. A gallery copy holds a significant place in the show—opposite a record player that spins a long take of whistling, played so quietly that its presence only becomes gradually apparent with time. Taking in the book to this subtle melody assists the sensation of complete immersion in reading—a conceptual non-space that Hamilton is deeply interested in delineating and replicating. By paging through *Sense*, one is also given the chance to see the radical continuity between different threads of Hamilton's artistic practice, a concordance of projects that, at its core, ponders the relationship between textile and text.



Ann Hamilton, *sense · stone, sense · study skin*, 2022. Archival pigment print on Japanese gampi paper, 113 1/2 x 34 inches. Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

The artist's incorporation of text as just another material in the book—one that can be found, scrapped, or woven into other contexts—helps to illustrate one of the central components of Hamilton's aesthetic philosophy, which is further referenced by her pointed fascination with animals: Humans differ from other species only in our ability to make meaning out of abstract thought. We spend much of our time in this world of ideas—more and more of it, actually, as our lives are increasingly taken up by the consumption of media. Using the mediation of her art to instead signal the body, and to gesture to its direct experience within the space that it occupies, Hamilton focuses on our consonance with animals to illustrate a Cartesian point, one so obvious that it's often taken for granted: Our understanding of the world is never more than the sum of our sensory inputs. We relish visceral pleasure and higher meaning alike when our environments impart sensory inputs in concert—those that build on each other to create complex harmonies. Hamilton's role as an artist is to be the conductor of this concert, guiding the viewer toward a


sensory apotheosis with the instruments of everyday life. She is achieving increasingly symphonic results.

Contributor

Nolan Kelly

Nolan Kelly is a writer and filmmaker based in Brooklyn, NY.

Art Review: HERE: Ann Hamilton, Jenny Holzer, Maya Lin

 columbusunderground.com/art-review-here-ann-hamilton-jenny-holzer-maya-lin-jr1

About the Author Jeff Regensburger is a painter, librarian, and drummer in the rock combo The Christopher Rendition. He received a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts (Painting and Drawing) from The Ohio State University in 1990 and an Master's Degree in Library Science from Kent State University in 1997. Jeff blogs sporadically (OnSummit.blogspot.com), tweets occasionally ([@jeffrey_r](https://twitter.com/jeffrey_r)), and paints as time allows. Connect with Jeff

November 20,
2019



The Wexner Center for the Arts celebrates its 30th anniversary with an exhibition that rightly aspires to the bold promise and grand vision of the building that originally opened in 1989. In *HERE: Ann Hamilton, Jenny Holzer, Maya Lin*, the Wexner Center presents visitors with the work of three eminent, Ohio-born artists; artists whose careers have spanned a similar timeline and who have proven to be as bold and visionary as the structure their work occupies. *HERE* invites us to reflect on the particular time and place we inhabit. It inserts a push pin into our collective map and suggests the decidedly non-rhetorical questions, “How did we get here?” and “Where do we go from here?” It’s an exhibition that rewards reflection, but also demands action.

Description is more valuable than metaphor.

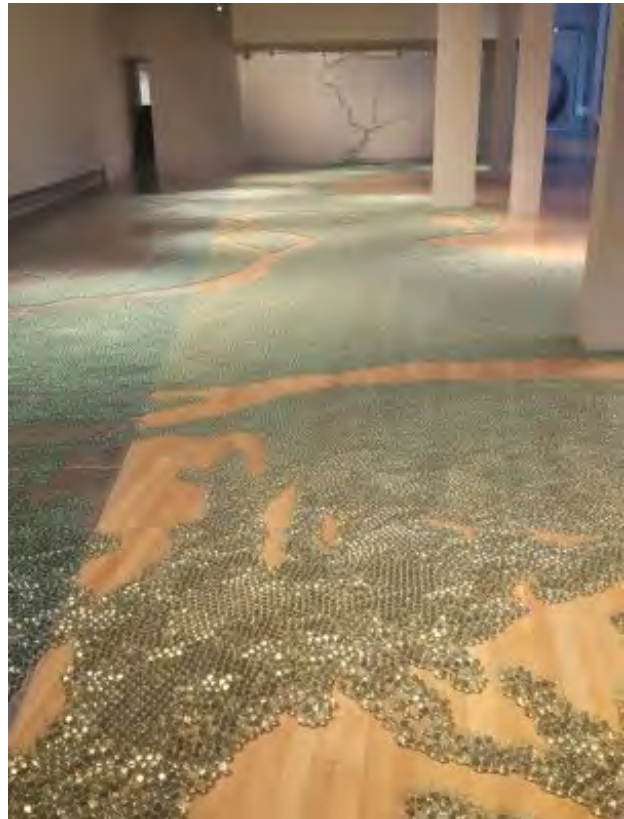
-Jenny Holzer, from Truisms (1977-79)

It’s true, at least in the case of *HERE*. For all the conceptual flourishes and diverse materiality on view, the works of Hamilton, Holzer and Lin present – if not an overt narrative flow – then at least a form of high-level exposition.

In *Pin River-Ohio Aquifers* and *How Does A River Overflow Its Banks?*, Lin illustrates the complex fragilities of our relationship to our environment. She brings the here and now of Ohio's water systems directly into the gallery space through works that merge cartography, geography, activism and contemporary art. Further, and just as importantly, they're stunning.

Pin River-Ohio Aquifers is a dizzying installation composed of over 80,000 stainless steel pins representing the underground systems we rely on for potable water. And while the mapping and installation are precise, the optical effect of these tightly packed pins is such that the work never comes into perfect focus. It hovers and shimmers depending on distance, light and point of view. Similarly, *How Does A River Overflow Its Banks?* creates an ever-changing pattern of light and color across its vast, meandering route. The carpet of clear glass beads reflect and refract the gallery environs as viewers navigate and explore its path.

Language, exposition and description are front and center in Jenny Holzer's work. For *HERE*, the artist has redeployed her groundbreaking *Truisms* and *Inflammatory Essays* to create a compelling, thought-provoking environment. The edge-to-edge pattern of display, the volume of words and their seeming inviolability forces viewers to question assumptions and confront the dynamics and discrepancies of power. Originally conceived as posters to be hung guerrilla style in public places, the text of *Truisms* and *Inflammatory Essays* is made monumental in this floor to ceiling presentation. The relentless repetition creates a of truth of its own, illustrating the lesson of "staying on message" that is clearly not lost on today's politicians and pundits.



May Lin | How Does a River Overflow Its Banks?
(installation view) | 2019 | Glass marbles,
adhesive | 15' x 20' x 60' (estimate)

A different kind of truth, one that eschews maxims and slogans for cold, hard realities is shared by Holtzer in the form of five marble benches. Set amid *Truisms*, these benches are engraved with excerpts from the works of Polish poet Anna Świrszczyńska and detail the atrocities Świrszczyńska witnessed in Nazi occupied Poland. Their dark, polished surfaces serve as stark reminders that words are not mere abstractions. They have real and often disastrous consequences.

Hamilton's contribution to *HERE* focuses on the objects we make and the meaning we assign them. For Hamilton, our "here" is best reflected and understood in our need to create. Her sprawling installation *when an object reaches for your hand* presents scans of a wide variety of material objects. Some are from the personal collections of friends, while others are culled from rarely seen collections at Ohio State. Hamilton invites viewers to actively participate in the exhibition by taking these image sheets with them. These can either be mailed to others or kept for oneself. With this participatory element Hamilton not only establishes a reciprocal relationship with the audience, she also completes a conceptual circle by taking a three-dimensional object, rendering it in two-dimensions, and then inviting the viewer, through the act of taking, to turn it back to a three-dimensional object to be kept and carried.

The scans themselves are exquisite. They are by turns intimate, provocative, whimsical, heart-breaking and joyous. They reflect our world, but also suggest its ephemeral nature. These images, in their gauzy, spectral way, make it impossible to establish the status of the object depicted. Is it coming into view, or receding from it? Will I be able to hold this thing or is it going to disappear? Is it here or gone?



Jenny Holzer | *Inflammatory Essays* (detail) | (1979-82) 2019 | Offset posters on colored paper



Ann Hamilton | when an object reaches for your hand (installation view) |
2019/20 | Printed images, record players, records, projected text
- A collaboration between the Wexner Center for the Arts and Thompson
Library

And that's the question that ties this exhibition together. Can we know "here"? Can we define it? Lin can map it. Holzer can articulate it. Hamilton can invite us to act in it. But will "here" hold still long enough for us to understand it? Is "here" a thing we carry with us, from time to time and place to place, or is "here" the place we stand while time and events rush past?

An answer (if there is one) is suggested in the Wexner Center's efforts to push *HERE* beyond the confines of the gallery space itself. Holtzer's works appear on kiosks in the Short North. They were also on temporary display (to no small amount of confusion and consternation)

on the scrolling news ticker at Broad and High. Additional images from Hamilton's *when an object reaches for your hand* are on view at The Ohio State University's Thompson Library as well as on large-scale outdoor banners at Mershon Auditorium and 82 N. High St. Lin's *Groundswell* remains on permanent display as an installation outside the Wexner Center. Put another way, if you want to see *HERE*, well, you'll need to go there, too.

Metaphysical questions aside, we can be grateful for 30 years of the Wexner Center for the Arts and the exhibition that celebrates those years. *HERE: Ann Hamilton, Jenny Holzer, Maya Lin* provides a unique perspective on where we are now, and by extension, where we might go.

HERE: Ann Hamilton, Jenny Holzer, Maya Lin is on view at the Wexner Center for the Arts, 1871 N. High St., through December 29, 2019. For more information visit wexarts.org.

All photos by Jeff Regensburger



Jenny Holzer | Inflammatory Essays (installation view) | (1979-82) 2019 |
Offset posters on colored paper



Ann Hamilton | when an object reaches for your hand (detail) | 2019/20 | Printed images, record players, records, projected text
- A collaboration between the Wexner Center for the Arts and Thompson Library

The Columbus Dispatch

[Entertainment & Life](#)

Artist Ann Hamilton adds sensory layers with photographs taken through 'magic' material

By [Allison Ward](#)

The Columbus Dispatch

Posted Oct 25, 2019 at 10:16 AM

Updated Oct 25, 2019 at 10:18 AM

Artist and Ohio State professor Ann Hamilton spent the past few weeks photographing people on campus behind a semi-transparent membrane for her ongoing project "ONEEVERYONE." The process creates a foggy, ethereal effect in which only the parts of the person touching the membrane appear in focus.

Artist Ann Hamilton was focused on the subject right in front of her, but she couldn't help but notice the toddler running by.

Dressed head-to-toe in mismatched clothes — a multicolored winter hat, a pink striped coat and sparkly rainbow high tops — 2-year-old Sophia Dowell was an ideal person to include in the artist's ongoing project: "ONEEVERYONE."

"Can we photograph her?" Hamilton asked of Sophia's mother, Ashley.

A little hesitant, Ashley agreed but needed more information about the unusual scene the mother-daughter duo came across Wednesday while exploring Thompson Library at Ohio State University.

Hamilton, a world-renowned visual artist — she received the [National Medal of Arts from President Barack Obama in 2015](#) — had set up shop in the atrium of the library to take portraits of passersby for the ongoing project. Subjects posed at the direction of Hamilton behind a semi-transparent membrane.

It's a project she began in 2012 when she was partnered with Bayer MaterialScience as part of an endeavor with the Andy Warhol Museum that linked artists with Pittsburgh-based businesses.

"One of the researchers there mentioned this material, and I put it in my hands," said Hamilton, 63, a professor in OSU's Department of Art. "It was so interesting — only my hands were in focus. It made touch visible."

On her website, she has called the phenomenon "magic."

At first she began photographing objects behind the material, with only the parts that touch the surface in focus; the outline was rendered more softly. Then she thought it would be fascinating to have people go behind a curtain of the soft, skin-like film called Duraflex, a thermoplastic polyurethane membrane used to make bladders for holding large volumes of liquid.

The result: Portraits that seem ethereal, according to her subjects.

"There is something distinct about a picture with the membrane," said Taylor Ross, 27, who graduated from Ohio State with his master's of fine arts in May. "There is a dream-like quality to them."

Or, as senior photography student Amber Woodside, 34, of Lancaster, described it: "It's like you're coming out of a fog."

Though many of the people waiting to be photographed during Wednesday's session — it was one of five scheduled throughout the past two weeks — were current and former art students and faculty, others simply walked by, curious about the scene, or saw a friend post about it on social media. The sessions were open to the public in an effort to showcase the Ohio State community.

Roughly 500 portraits were taken for a book that will be distributed in the spring to honor the university's sesquicentennial celebration. Hamilton has created similar books for other institutions — [the Dell Medical School at the University of Texas at Austin](#), for example — and in gallery format for a number of museums.

And while she was busy working at Ohio State on this project, the Lima native's past work was simultaneously being celebrated elsewhere around town. "[Here: Ann Hamilton, Jenny Holzer, Maya Lin](#)" paired her work with other prominent female artists from Ohio at the Wexner Center for the Arts and other locations around Columbus. The OSU Urban Arts Space has included her as part of an ongoing exhibit called "Transference."

Hamilton was eager to bring her "ONEEVERYONE" project to a place so familiar to her.

"It's really wonderful to be in the library and experience ... the breadth of the community who are working and studying here," Hamilton said. "Even though you're with them for only a few minutes, you're really seeing the person."

Meredith Wang, 21, was a bit nervous when she went behind the screen, especially after she realized she couldn't see through it, even though it appeared transparent. However, she relaxed after a few seconds of listening to Hamilton's calm directions projected through a microphone:

Your eyelashes are so long. Close your eyes. Put your chin up.

"I think this is so amazing and so smart, yet the concept is so simple," said Wang, also a senior photography student at OSU who was inspired by the experience.

"I love it. They're so soft," she said of the photographs she was able to preview on a tablet set up to give people a sneak peek.

Hamilton wasn't running the actual camera — assistant Kara Gut did that. Instead, Hamilton led the subject in a series of movements, sometimes requiring the person to take off glasses or a jacket to get the perfect pose. Hamilton said it helps that the subjects can't see through the membrane because it provides privacy and allows them to focus on her voice.

"Each time it's different, and it's live and responsive," she said. "We're making it together and even though it's a brief crossing, it feels like something happens."

Though the shy Sophia Dowell refused to look toward the camera during her mini photo shoot with her mother, it couldn't have worked out better, Hamilton said.

"It's so beautiful to see her gesture — her hand is touching you in the most beautiful way," an excited Hamilton said to the girl's mother.

One of the photos featured Ashley Dowell looking at her daughter while the blurred effect of the membrane created almost a heart around the two.

"It looks really good," the Hilliard resident said. "The photos look like they're painted."

award@dispatch.com

[@AllisonAWard](#)

Disused West Coast Urban Landmarks Become Art Havens

How repurposed classic structures float into modernity.

BY ZAHID SARDAR



ART CAN REVITALIZE URBAN LANDMARKS that might otherwise get erased. Two evocative installations — a temporary site-specific work in a historic industrial pavilion in Portland, Oregon, and an adaptive reuse of a former church in San Francisco — vividly illustrate the growing potential.

IN PORTLAND LAST FALL during Converge 45/Art on the 45th Parallel, the city's annual visual arts gathering now in its fourth cycle, the defunct Centennial Mills flour factory with its iconic water tower came alive with an infusion of art. The tower had languished for decades because Portlanders can't agree on what should happen to its 7-acre site on the northwest banks of the Willamette River.

The site-specific installation called *habitus*, originally created in 2016 by Ohio conceptual artist Ann Hamilton for Philadelphia's waterfront and the Fabric Workshop and Museum, consisted of 12 giant cylindrical white curtains that can be spun at will by pulling on bell ropes connected to pulleys.



During Converge 45, artist Ann Hamilton’s 2018 *Habitus* installation at the Centennial Mills flour factory’s steel-frame pavilion in Portland, Oregon, included swirling white fabric curtains as well as takeaway printouts of literary excerpts and images related to “habitus” or dispositions on shelter, sanctuary and dwelling. Top: Visitors were also encouraged to interact with the installation.

Reconfigured to fit Centennial Mills’ outdoor steel-frame pavilion that until recently served as a paddock for mounted-police horses, *habitus*, swirling around a hand-built scale model of Portland that city planners used in the 1970s to assess possible new structures against existing ones, here became a metaphor for clouds of controversy. Printouts of images and writings/thoughts related to “habitus,” or dispositions on shelter, sanctuary and dwelling, were gathered online by volunteers and stacked daily during the monthlong presentation on tables for attendees to read or take and perhaps ponder what the Centennial Mills site should become.

Hamilton’s often-interactive work has the power to move people to action; among her other projects is a 2007 cast-concrete cylindrical tower with a double-helix staircase serving as both performance stage and audience seating at the Oliver Ranch near Geyserville, California. Invited by Converge founder and Portland gallerist Elizabeth Leach and guest artistic director Kristy Edmunds, who heads the Center for the Art of Performance at UCLA, Hamilton explains that she worked with fabric here because cloth is a primal material for architecture. *Habitus*, she adds, is a “conversation” that makes room for questions, and any collaborative conversation “is like pushing a threaded needle through cloth. There is a space you cannot see for a moment until you pull up the thread to make a form. The seen and unseen, the known and unknown together form the work.”



A child looks closely at a 1970s model of the city.

MORE ECCLESIASTICAL in tenor, interior designer Ken Fulk's Saint Joseph's Arts Society had a giddy, theatrical opening last October in San Francisco's Saint Joseph's Church. Filled with costume, song and dance, the event marked a shining new chapter for the 1913 historic steel-frame landmark designed by architect John J. Foley.

The October 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake had rendered this Romanesque Revival structure with two gilded domed towers unsafe, and it remained shuttered for decades until now. Fulk, along with co-owners Chris Foley and Palisade Builders, enlisted preservation architects Page & Turnbull (who also restored the enormous Ferry Building) to judiciously transform and expand the 13,000-square-foot multistory edifice into a versatile club where members can celebrate and promote the arts, design, fashion and food.



San Francisco's 1913 Saint Joseph's Church designed by architect John J. Foley was recently restored and reopened by designer Ken Fulk as the Saint Joseph's Arts Society, a club where members and the public can celebrate the arts. The apsidal altar is now a stage outfitted for performances by musicians and dancers; upstairs, art galleries overlooking the central nave showcase designs by the likes of Studio Job and Studio Drift; and on the main floor, purveyors of art books, fashion items and flowers from Mr. Fulk's Flower Factory hold court.

Starting with 20 subscriber members who will support 20 nonpaying artists, the society and its nonprofit philanthropic arm, Saint Joseph's Arts Foundation, hope to attract as many as 400 members. Each subscriber will be able to support an artist whose creativity will in turn feed arts and education programs and residencies. Many ticketed art exhibitions and theatrical and musical performances will be open to the public.

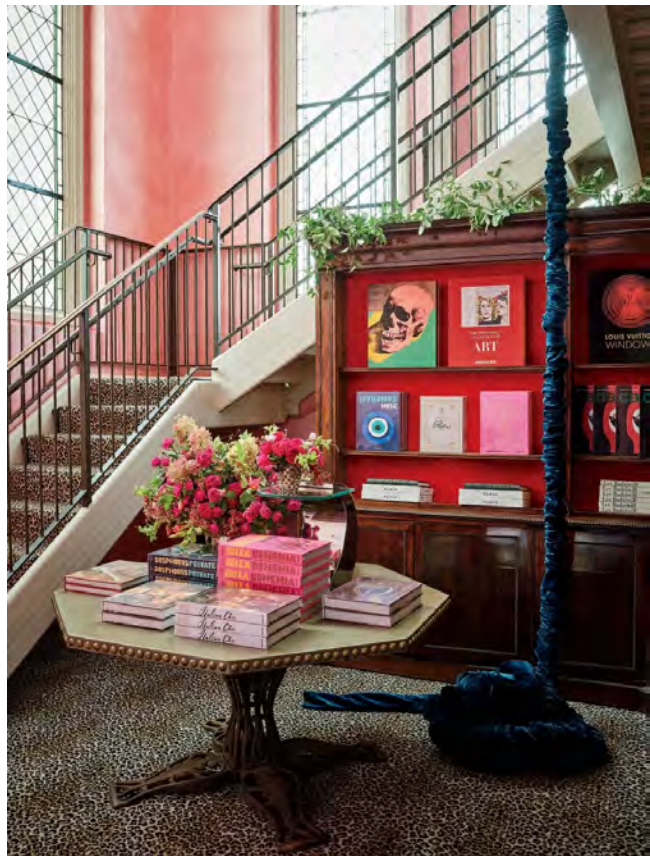
Lounges upholstered in Pierre Frey fabrics and communal dining tables float in the nave atop a show-stopping 32-by-46-foot 1920s Persian rug made for New York's Union League Club. Alongside it, eight equally sumptuous niches that were once private chapels are now reservation-only curtained salons finished by Dawson Custom Workroom.

A raised stage for performances, fitted into the domed apse, is flanked by drinking bars and backed by Rome Prize-winning artist Catherine Wagner's 30-foot-high photographic mural depicting the Room of the Scholars from the Capitoline Museum in Rome. Several rooms on either side of the apse and within the reconstructed towers are hidden dining destinations, with the original stained oak trim, gold accents, plaster walls and stained-glass windows all restored by artisans.



A new freestanding steel mezzanine and bridge structure — like a modern-day baldachin — in the center of the nave adds 9,000 square feet for two art galleries and a full kitchen; the wide-ranging arts programming will include immersive dinners by guest chefs and pop-up stores from tony retailers. Already Saint Joseph's is brimming with vintage glassware as well as goods from French apothecary brand L'Officine Universelle Buly and book publisher Assouline, fashion from Respoke and Lingua Franca, and blooms from Mr. Fulk's Flower Factory. Sculpture, photographs and taxidermy by Dutch creatives Darwin, Sinke & van Tongeren; works by Dutch artists Studio Drift and Nacho Carbonell; a trompe l'oeil mural by Rafael Arana; and collectibles from the Carpenters Workshop Gallery are also among the highlights.

Perhaps the last time something like this happened in the city was during the 1980s when famed costume and set designer Tony Duquette created his moody Duquette Pavilion of St. Francis in an abandoned Fillmore District synagogue. The pavilion regrettably was destroyed by fire in 1989, but perhaps Fulk's Saint Joseph's has risen as its conceptual phoenix.



This article originally appeared in Spaces's print edition under the headline: "Time Capsules"

SITI Company and Ann Hamilton set sail for Virginia Woolf's 'To the Lighthouse'

[latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-theater-is-a-blank-page-review-20180501-htmlstory.html](https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-theater-is-a-blank-page-review-20180501-htmlstory.html)

By Charles McNulty



The solitary act of reading becomes a shared activity in “The Theater Is a Blank Page,” a graceful collaboration between visual artist Ann Hamilton and SITI Company, director Anne Bogart’s avant-garde troupe.

At the center of this immersive performance installation, an interdisciplinary offering presented by UCLA’s Center for the Art of Performance, is Virginia Woolf’s “To the Lighthouse.” Theatergoers, divided into small groups (attendance is limited to 90 people overall) are guided to different parts of Royce Hall, where Woolf’s 1927 novel, one of the glories of literary modernism, is summoned in a theatrical séance.

Hamilton constructs different spaces through the scenic manipulation of simple materials such as white fabric, brooms and shredded paper. Brian H. Scott’s hypnotic lighting, inspired by the book’s island setting, creates effects that merge sea and sky. Darron L. West’s soundscape complements the Neptune-like environment with an ocean of strange sounds and sweet melodies.



Onlookers become participants in the reading of Woolf's book. Maria Alejandra Cardona / Los Angeles Times

Bogart, who co-directed with Hamilton, orchestrates these scenes with her usual geometric care. But the spirit of the production is relaxed and communal. At the start of the piece, we watch from the topmost seats in the mezzanine (most of the rows are covered in sheets) as ensemble members slowly prepare the stage.

We are witnesses, in effect, to the act of creation, a central theme of "To the Lighthouse." The relationship of chaos, the reality we inhabit, to form, the imposition of order and meaning through creative vision, is explored in the book through the minds of the characters — artists and intellectuals and those who love them — gathered at Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's vacation home in the Hebrides.

Theatrical performance, a more ephemeral art than literature, crystalizes Woolf's idea that the nobility of artistic expression doesn't lie in its enduring revelation. ("The very stone one kicks with one's book will outlast Shakespeare," thinks Mr. Ramsay, the philosopher husband and father perennially troubled by the impermanence of his intellectual achievements.)



The words of "To the Lighthouse" are intoned, projected or slipped into the audience's hands on streams of ribbon. Maria Alejandra Cardona / Los Angeles Times



The UCLA audience takes the script in hand. Maria Alejandra Cardona / Los Angeles Times

The most human beings can hope for, as Lily Briscoe, the unmarried painter who's working on an abstract portrait of Mrs. Ramsay reading a story to her 6-year-old son, "are the little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark." Created and performed by SITI Company, "The Theater Is a Blank Page" explores the way perception, refined by the artistic process, can resonate collectively in a field in which individuals are invited to examine anew the beauty and bafflement around them.

Onlookers at first, audience members become participants as they make their passage from the nosebleed seats to the stage itself. Different tasks are assigned to us, nothing at all taxing or anxiety-inducing, just a little bit of choral reading, scenic assistance and trooping about.

Woolf's language is a provocation to group meditation. The words of her book are intoned, projected, slipped into our hands on streams of ribbon. A reader sitting at a desk with a low lamp intones sections of the novel that are fed to her on a wheel; the ribbon of text passes through her hands like the web of threads Penelope weaves and unweaves in "The Odyssey."



A reader sitting at a desk with a low lamp intones sections of Woolf's novel that are fed to via a ribbon of text. Maria Alejandra Cardona / Los Angeles Times

The role of the Reader at the reviewed performance was magnificently assumed by Rena Chelouche Fogel, who quite possibly has the most exquisite reading voice I've ever heard. (Her timbre renders the inner murmur one experiences when sitting alone with a brilliant book into something elegantly soothing.) Texts and mini-flashlights are checked out to audience members in library fashion, allowing us to follow along if we so choose.

Before attending "The Theater Is a Blank Page," I reread "To the Lighthouse" and then, enraptured once again with Woolf's prose, listened to the audiobook narrated by Nicole Kidman. I worried that perhaps I had done too much homework, but my preparation released me from any concern about making sense of the story, which is told here only in fragments. (I'd suggest theatergoers read a summary of the novel beforehand and then just exist in the moment-to-moment theatrical reality of the performance, free of any worry about plot, which is hardly the *raison d'être* of Woolf's fictional experiment.)

"To the Lighthouse" defies dramatization. SITI Company doesn't try to adapt the book, which is wise because Woolf's narrative, which flits from consciousness to consciousness, is too delicate and elusive for straightforward theatrical incarnation.

The text, made physical through voice and vision, becomes part of the *mise en scène*. But Hamilton and SITI aren't taking a decorative approach to "To the Lighthouse." More ambitiously, they are translating the aesthetic space of the novel to the stage.



Akiko Aizawa in "The Theater Is a Blank Page." Maria Alejandra Cardona / Los Angeles Times

The rhythm of the production is tentative at times, especially at the outset, when the company appears hesitant to begin. The performance installation entices us by exciting our sensibilities; it doesn't seek to dictate our experience. The staging coaxes rather than compels.

The performers operate like brushstrokes on an impressionist canvas. Ellen Lauren, wearing just the kind of shoes Mrs. Ramsay might wear marching into town to do a good deed for the poor, anchors the production with crisp female authority that turns impersonal and all-seeing in the "Time Passes" section of the novel. Akiko Aizawa, tangling herself in the matrix of white textile strips audience members help assemble after the performers iron the fabric, creates a vision of a character vanishing as the pages containing her come to a close.

But it's the reverence for a great book that filled me with a kind of religious emotion. Reading is transformed into rituals that tantalize us with the deeper meanings of a literary masterwork while luring us to question the essence of theatrical performance, the way it joins strangers, artists and civilians alike, in a passing cloud of understanding.



Ann Hamilton and SITI Company's 'The Theater Is a Blank Page'

Where: Royce Hall, UCLA, 340 Royce Drive, L.A.

When: 8 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays; ends May 12

Tickets: \$119 general admission

Information: (310) 825-2101 or cap.ucla.edu

Running time: 2 hours, 30 minutes

charles.mcnulty@latimes.com

Follow me [@charlesmcnulty](https://twitter.com/charlesmcnulty)

Ann Hamilton's Portraits that Blur and Isolate

hyperallergic.com/357461/ann-hamiltons-portraits-that-blur-and-isolate

Anne Blood

February 9,
2017



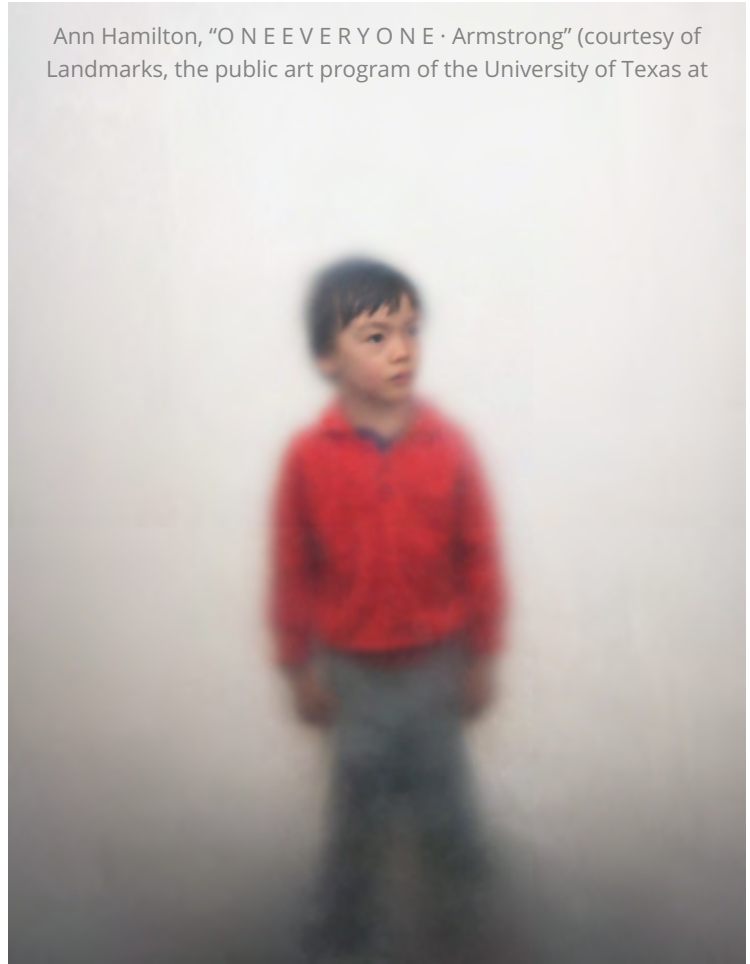
Ann Hamilton, *ONE EVERYONE* panels in the Health Learning Building at the University of Texas at Austin (photo by Paul Bardagjy, courtesy of Landmarks, the public art program of the University of Texas at Austin)

AUSTIN, Texas — Ann Hamilton's portrait series *ONE EVERYONE* is based on two ideas: the systematic representation of the individual and the commonality of people in all their manifestations. The bridge between these two ideas is touch, which plays a literal and abstract role in the work.

To date, the series has appeared in several iterations in Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, New York, Seattle, and, most recently, here in Austin. Variations occur at each location: in Pittsburgh, she photographed employees from [Bayer MaterialScience LLC](#) and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*; in Minneapolis, docents, curators, and volunteers from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts; and in New York, visitors to the Art Dealers Association of America's [annual art fair](#). But in each instance, Hamilton's process remains the same: the subject is photographed standing behind a sheet of Duraflex (a thermoplastic polyurethane membrane) suspended from a curtain. The artist was introduced to Duraflex during a residency at Bayer

MaterialScience in 2012, when an employee handed her a sample and suggested she might find the incidental material qualities of the thin plastic membrane intriguing. During each encounter that leads to an image for *ONE EVERYONE*, Duraflex provides both a barrier and frame because, when standing behind the skin-like film, the subject cannot see the artist and fragments of their body only come into focus when they touch the plastic membrane, while the rest of their form is left an obscured blur. Isolated, the subjects must react solely to the artist's verbal instructions as to how to position their bodies, allowing their aural sense to supersede their visual one.

Ann Hamilton, "ONE EVERYONE · Armstrong" (courtesy of Landmarks, the public art program of the University of Texas at



Austin)



Ann Hamilton, *ONE EVERYONE* at the Texas State Capitol (photo by Lawrence Peart, courtesy of Landmarks, the public art program of the University of Texas at Austin)

Place is central to Hamilton's practice, and in Austin, she responded to the architectural spaces of the newly established Dell Medical School at the University of Texas at Austin (UT), framing this iteration of her project around the belief that human touch is the most essential means of contact and asking how touch can be an expression of care. She photographed over 500 people at 12 locations across the Texan capital over the course of three one-week residencies, resulting in over 21,000 discrete images. Yet during each encounter, the hand of the artist is removed — Hamilton does not take the photographs and she relies on her voice to compose the image. Although the subjects only come into focus when they touch the sheet of Duraflex, their encounter with the artist relies on a connection that privileges sound, or more precisely conversation, over physical contact.

Commissioned by Landmarks (the University of Texas at Austin's public art program), ONE EVERYONE joins a number of public works across the UT campus by an impressive array of artists, including Michael Ray Charles, Nancy Rubins, and James Turrell. Because parts of the medical school are still under construction, only 14 over-life-size enamel panels have been unveiled in situ and the remaining panels (close to 70 have been produced), which are scheduled to be installed sometime in April, are currently on view along with related objects in an exhibition at the school's Visual Art Center. Here, inclusion of installation plans and a piece of Duraflex make the display feel like an interactive appendix to the commission, with

the artist's process laid bare alongside the finished work.



Ann Hamilton, "O N E E V E R Y O N E · Damian" (courtesy of Landmarks, the public art program of the University of Texas at

Austin)



Ann Hamilton, *ONE EVERYONE* at Huston-Tillotson University (photo by Christina S. Murrey, courtesy of Landmarks, the public art program of the University of Texas at Austin)

Like so many of the artist's projects, this series manifests in a number of forms: enamel panels, a book, a newspaper, an image library, and a website. Though somewhat disconnected, these different outputs reflect Hamilton's interest in what she describes as the democracy of art. The 900-page book and newspaper are offered for free to visitors to the VAC exhibition and to students (and, eventually, to patients) at the medical school, while images on the website are available for download at no cost. The possibilities of the afterlife of these components, of how they are handled and used, echo the artist's recurring interest in touch as a physical sensation and an abstract form of exchange. Hamilton insists that the project is not about photography, even though the largest part of the multi-faceted work is photographic — both digital and printed. This is a puzzling declaration, but it does push us to move beyond the objects that compose her series to focus on the question that is woven through its myriad forms. As a project that foregrounds a repetitive process, the series is necessarily open-ended, and Hamilton is quick to stress that she is uninterested in establishing boundaries or neatly tying up the loose ends, which is why approaching her work with a question is the most rewarding path.

During a week's worth of public talks last month in Austin, Hamilton often reiterated the importance of empathy and trust to her practice, but she intriguingly admitted that, while she frames her exploration of touch within these safe ideals, contact is also always crisis.

Her images, with large expanses of milky soft focus, exude an ethereal (sometimes saccharine) quality, but when returning to Hamilton's process and her framing question, vulnerability rises as a central concern in the project. Viewing *O N E E V E R Y O N E* during the current political climate, when promises of affordable healthcare and personal safety are threatened, it is hard not to see these images, constructed through an exchange of trust, as no longer just beautiful, but fragile.

Ann Hamilton's O N E E V E R Y O N E panels are permanently installed in the Dell Medical School at the University of Texas at Austin (1501 Red River Street, Austin, Texas). The accompanying exhibition is on view at the Visual Arts Center (23rd and Trinity Streets, Austin, Texas) through February 24.

Ann Hamilton, "O N E E V E R Y O N E · Isabel" (courtesy of Landmarks,



the public art program of the University of Texas at Austin)

REVIEWS ARTISTS MUSEUMS

Between Text and Textile – Ann Hamilton’s “habitus”

By [Andrea Kirsh](#) *September 24, 2016*

Andrea loved Ann Hamilton's twin exhibitions at Municipal Pier 9 and the Fabric Workshop Museum. What's not to love about whirligigs of fabric? – Artblog Editor



Ann Hamilton • habitus • 2016. Installation at Municipal Pier 9, made in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia. Photo credit: Thibault Jeanson.

Ann Hamilton is the rare artist who can harness the power of very large spaces and she's done so again at both the riverfront warehouse at Municipal Pier 9—on view through October 10, 2016—and at the Fabric Workshop Museum through January 8, 2017. The Fabric Workshop has organized both portions under the joint title, "[habitus](#)," and both installations were designed by the artist, with supremely poetic feelings for the spaces.

Whirligigs of fabric

The installation at Pier 9, open to ambient weather conditions at the front and side of an enormous warehouse, consists of a dozen huge pendant circles of fabric curtains, each tucked up in swags at points, which spin to the action of bell-rope pulleys. The curtains' endless movement in a counterclockwise direction is like the coordinated circling in a ballroom of dancers doing a Viennese waltz. Hamilton always invokes more than one sense with her work; here it is the sight of the swirling fabric, the oddly musical sound of the pulley mechanisms, and the touch of the pulleys—which visitors are encouraged to operate—as well as the physical sense of wind on the body from both the swirling fabric and the river breezes.



Ann Hamilton • habitus • 2016. Installation at Municipal Pier 9, made in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia. Photo credit: Thibault Jeanson.

“Habitus” has the rare ability to turn an involved visitor into a child again—able to succumb purely to sensations. I stood inside one of the circular curtains as it spun, and looking up I experienced the exhilaration of being on a rollercoaster, without the queasiness in my stomach. As the curtain spun to the action of the pulley—operated by FWM staff when other visitors weren’t—it brushed along my body in varying patterns that shifted with the wind, which at one point was strong enough that I found myself outside the Tyvek curtains, although I’d started within. Adults aren’t usually offered such fun. It’s an experience available for a limited period of time, and not to be missed by children of all ages.

“[Habitus](#),” a term most often used in sociology, refers to the inclinations of a group of people of a common background towards ways of thinking and behaving in

ARTBLOG ARCHIVES

ARTISTS

COMICS

GALLERIES

MUSEUMS

ART FAIRS

INTERVIEWS

AUDIO

VIDEO

ARTBLOG RADIO

READER ADVISOR

THE 3:00 BOOK

BOOK REVIEWS

MOVIE REVIEWS

MUSIC REVIEWS

BANANAZZ

BALD SPOT COMICS

SUPPORT

SUBSCRIBE

social situations. Hamilton has structured both parts of the exhibition around her ongoing preoccupation with both fabric—that man-made material which we all wear next to our skin—and reading, texts, and textiles. She is interested in the making and unmaking of both. While the artist may have a precise connection of the various parts of “habitus” at both venues, I’d suggest that visitors succumb to the sensual allure and let the ideas arise as an induced series of associations, which is the way many artists deal with written materials. This is not work with a singular concept which requires a precise explication of its individual parts to make sense.

Behind the whirling fabric in the warehouse two figures perform repetitions, one spinning wool with a hand spindle, the other rending a sweater with a knife. Like Penelope, weaving and unweaving the shroud of Odysseus while he is off fighting the Trojan War, these figures are making and unmaking. As they work, two poems by Susan Stewart are projected in an endless loop onto a shipping crate.

Stewart’s poetry has been important to Hamilton, and they have collaborated before (and they will do a [reading together at Pier 9](#) on October 8 from 6–7:30 pm).

On the first floor of the Fabric Workshop Museum is another work utilizing the same two poems, this time inscribed on a piece of cloth which reveals the text as it is

wound from one reel to a second one, then back again. Hamilton asked the poet to use the format of palindrome poems, which make sense in both directions.



Ann Hamilton • habitus • 2016. Installation at Municipal Pier 9, made in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia. Photo credit: Thibault Jeanson.

From municipal pier to museum wall

The rest of the ground floor of the Fabric Workshop Museum includes a range of Hamilton's work, selected and installed to create a monochrome environment the color of eggnog. It includes one single-

channel video and an installation of two looped videos, several poems embroidered on various textiles and a porcupine-like man's suit made of toothpicks. She has installed work on two upper floors including several of her own objects interspersed among a selection of objects borrowed widely from area collections and falling into two categories: textile-related material, including fabric swatches, dye examples, weaving and sewing patterns, dolls dressed in hand-sewn outfits, woven blankets, and sewing tools; and commonplace books, which are a form of diary, made up of selections from favored texts, that were popular before Xerox rendered hand-transcription obsolete. Both floors also offer visitors a chance to make their own commonplace books. [Hamilton set up a website](#) soliciting passages of text which make reference to textiles, then printed several hundred examples, each formatted according to her design. A long wall shelf on each floor holds stacks from which visitors can make a selection.

Both upper floors testify to Hamilton's sculptural sensibilities; they are hands down the most beautiful installations I have ever seen in the deep and somewhat awkward spaces at 1214 Arch Street. The eighth floor is filled with work in flat display cases designed by the artist so their legs extend upwards where they are connected by railings, looking like canopy beds

stripped of their curtains. Each has a sheet with identifying labels tied to the case, although visitors may simply wish to enjoy the assembly, which was arranged according to the artist's visual sensibilities rather than a curator's systematic and didactic display. But those who read the labels will discover some gems, including commonplace books by Philadelphia sculptor William Rush—[memorably painted by Thomas Eakins](#) as he worked from a nude model—Samuel Butler, and Charles Lamb, a small book which Hamilton has unmade by scratching out each line of text, and a fifth-grade schoolbook for sewing class with examples of darning, stitching, and pattern-making.

The sixth floor is distinguished by a sensitive openness of display, marked by several composites of Xerox reproductions of items of dolls' clothing which have been digitally enlarged to poster size and printed on gampi paper, then mounted to fabric. The process resulted in work with soft, slightly-indistinct details, a wax-like sheen and unevenly textured surfaces that are unlike anything I've ever seen. They are monumental and intimate at the same time, and thoroughly seductive. Hamilton has also made sculptural use of a long, cantilevered shelf opposite the entrance, supporting boxes of textile fragments, arranged for their use in classes taught at Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science, now Philadelphia University,

which lent them. The facing wall has a similar shelf of results from Hamilton's crowd-sourced texts to be assembled into commonplace books by visitors. Look long, and touch.

Ann Hamilton's "[habitus](#)" at Municipal Pier 9 is on view through October 10, 2016, and at the Fabric Workshop Museum through January 8, 2017. Open Tuesday–Sunday, 12–6 pm. Ann Hamilton will be giving a [lecture](#) on October 6 at 5:30 pm, and Susan Stewart and Ann Hamilton will also be doing a [poetry reading](#) together on October 8 at 6 pm.

The Columbus Dispatch

Ohio State art professor Ann Hamilton to get national medal

By Nancy Gilson & Jack Torry · Friday September 4, 2015



WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama will award the National Medal of Arts next week to Ann Hamilton, a visual artist and a professor of art at Ohio State University.

Obama and first lady Michelle Obama will present the awards on Thursday in the ornamental East Room of the White House. Hamilton will be among 11 artists receiving the award, along with actress Sally Field and author Stephen King.

Hamilton, 59, a professor at Ohio State since 2001, is internationally known for her multimedia installations. She creates ephemeral environments large and small that incorporate unlikely materials and often offer a poetic response to the architecture and social history of the site.

Her templelike creation for the United States Pavilion at the 1999 Venice Biennale, for example, was titled Myein, Greek for “to close the eyes or mouth.” The installation incorporated skylights, a glass and steel wall, wood table, white clothes, powder, electronic controllers, plaster, a computer and 16 speakers to reflect “the thing that has not been, or cannot be, explained.”

More recently, in April at the Wexner Center for the Arts’ Mershon Auditorium, she collaborated with the theatrical SITI Company of New York on a site-specific performance piece about space and time, the theater is a blank page.

Hamilton has been the recipient of a Heinz Award, a MacArthur Genius grant, a United States Artist Fellowship, the NEA Visual Arts Fellowship, and the Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship.

A native of Lima, Ohio, she studied textile design at the University of Kansas and sculpture at the Yale School of Art, where she earned a master’s degree.

She is married to artist Michael Mercil, also an artist and faculty member at Ohio State University.

Obama also will present the 2014 National Humanities Medal to 10 writers and scholars, including novelist Larry McMurtry, who wrote *The Last Picture Show* in 1966 and co-wrote the screenplay for the 2005 film, *Brokeback Mountain*, which won three Oscars.

The awards are provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, which were created as independent federal agencies by Congress in 1965. The two agencies have provided \$10 billion during the past 50 years for art and humanities research.

N.Y. / REGION

At Cortlandt Street Subway Station, Art Woven From Words

By DAVID W. DUNLAP APRIL 29, 2015

The Cortlandt Street station on the No. 1 line, which was wiped off the subway map on Sept. 11, 2001, will be much more than a local stop in Lower Manhattan when it reopens in 2018.

As a gateway to destinations of worldwide significance — the World Trade Center and the National September 11 Memorial and Museum — it will be weaving together past and present, present and potential, underground and surface, commuter trains and subway service, deep-rooted memory and momentary impatience.

Weaving. Not threads or reeds. But words.

Weaving is the symbolism behind the \$1 million art project being designed for the Cortlandt Street station by Ann Hamilton, who was chosen by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority Arts and Design program. Ms. Hamilton, 58, a professor of art at Ohio State University in Columbus, creates large-scale multimedia installations.

The construction of the station, which is to cost about \$101 million, is expected to begin in mid-May.

In Ms. Hamilton's concept, which is still evolving, texts would fill about 70 percent of the station's walls in the form of an elaborate concordance, something like a crossword puzzle.

Text fragments reading horizontally would probably come from documents of international significance, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

At intervals, certain words from the horizontal texts would align to form vertical spines. Those words — like "human" and "justice" — would be common to passages from national documents like the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Declaration of Sentiments, adopted in 1848 in Seneca Falls, N.Y., which held that "all men and women are created equal."

Explaining her approach, Ms. Hamilton said: "The station is in the ground. The ground is the underlayment, the place where we prepare for everything we build above. What are the documents that are the underlayment for our civic aspirations, the ones that have been collectively authored and collectively held?"

In 2011, she created an enormous concordance for the floor of the Thompson Library Buckeye Reading Room at Ohio State. The work is titled "Verse."

Sandra Bloodworth, the director of the transportation authority's Arts and Design program (formerly known as Arts for Transit), said the panel that chose Ms. Hamilton last year believed that her proposal "was mesmerizing and powerful, bringing a calming quality to a charged place."

Because the station will have a prominent entrance directly from the World Trade Center Transportation Hub, which is opening this year, Ms. Hamilton has deliberately worked in the nearly all-white palette established by Santiago Calatrava, the principal architect of the hub.

Carol Twombly. They will be white on a white surface, but probably in relief or somewhat recessed, so that their contours can be discerned.

“It doesn’t demand your attention,” Ms. Hamilton said, “but it catches your attention.”

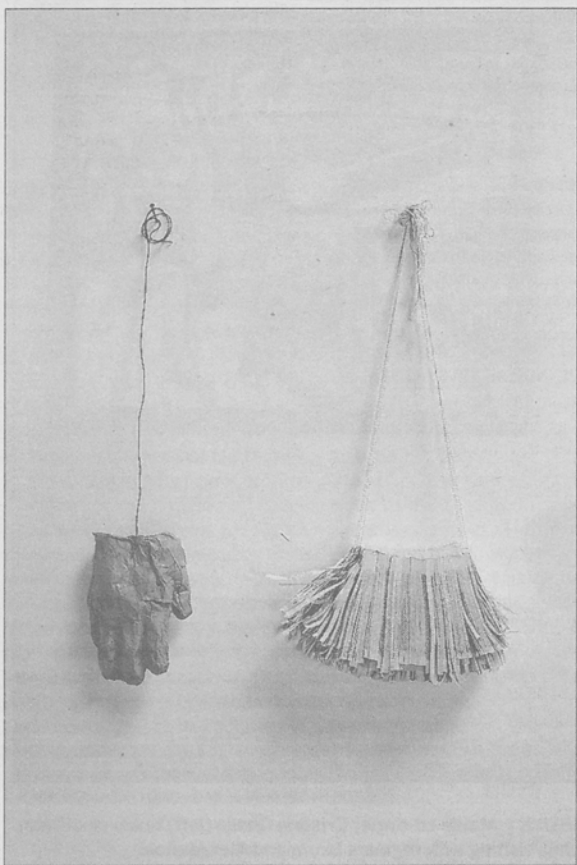
It has evidently caught the attention of those who have been given a preliminary glimpse.

“These are texts born in response to despotism, tyranny and mass murder,” the director of the memorial museum, Alice M. Greenwald, said. “They are expressions of hope and faith in the possibility that the best of our human nature can triumph over the worst.”

“To imagine that these words will now be part of the arrival and departure experience for commuters on their quotidian ritual journeys, and for tourists and visitors to the 9/11 memorial and museum, seems just right,” she said.

Catherine McVay Hughes, the chairwoman of Community Board 1 in Lower Manhattan, said, “Each of these travelers will bring their own associations to the words that Ann Hamilton assembles, and we’re looking forward to learning more about it.”

Even constant users of the station ought to notice different words and passages each time they walk through, said Jessica Lappin, the president of the Alliance for Downtown New York. “When it’s completed, it will allow us each to pause, reflect and interpret the station in our own way,” she said. “It should be moving and powerful and certainly worth the wait.”



Ann Hamilton's "Near-away," 2013, is made from paperback book slices, cheesecloth, string, bookbinders glue, brown kraft, methyl cellulose and steel wire.

Three elements rolled into one

By John Motley
Special to *The Oregonian*

For more than two decades, Ann Hamilton's work has explored the similarities among the acts of reading, writing and sewing, highlighting metaphorical connections between text and textile. For the artist, these activities are fundamentally linked to drawing: just as one negotiates a path in drawing a line, a reader moves linearly through a text and a seamstress stitches thread through fabric.

Hamilton's best-known works — epic, immersive environments such as "The Event of a Thread," which filled New York City's cavernous Park Avenue Armory last winter — allow viewers to experience this negotiation in spatial terms, as they chart their own paths through the artist's elaborate multimedia installations.

While "A Reading," up now at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, lacks the dramatic scale or overwhelming stimuli of Hamilton's most ambitious installations,

review

Ann Hamilton: "A Reading"
Where: Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 N.W. Ninth Ave., 503-224-0521
Hours: 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Tuesdays through Saturdays
Closes: Jan. 11
Admission: Free
Website: elizabethleach.com

the discreet works gathered here — from exhibitions at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts in St. Louis and more — concisely articulate the concepts that have defined her work to date.

In "(Lineament•Book/Ball)," 1994, the printed lines of a text have been cut into thin strips and wound into a ball resembling yarn. For "Cinder," 1999, a royal blue book-shaped case is opened, revealing a silver thimble minutely inscribed with a poem in lieu of the expected text. And the video dip-

tych "Follow," 2011, depicts the artist in a pair of gloves made from brown craft paper. In tight close-up, the paper hands, which are split across two monitors, trace a pair of thick spirals in charcoal.

Her taut visual vocabulary braids reading, sewing and drawing into inextricably knotty formulations, bound by figurative language that links the three activities. For instance, the book ball reminds that to tell a story is "to spin a yarn," while the "hand-in-glove" imagery of "Follow" foregrounds the parallels between following a line of text and tracing a drawn line.

This linguistic play may be a peripheral aspect of the work, but it also gives context to the show's title. Rather than "a reading" as a recitation of a text, Hamilton's ti-

tle, especially her use of the indefinite article, suggests a singular interpretation — one particular way of looking at something.

For the artist, that perspective posits an innate connection between written and spoken language and the textile arts, whose specific terminologies have become entwined over centuries. In her work, we can recognize knitting, weaving and interlacing for their resemblance to syntax. And conversely, we see how threadlike words are assembled to form the fabric of language. This linguistic ligature is an exceptionally intelligent way to reconcile the divide between the craft arts and contemporary conceptualism: In the separating gap, Hamilton finds space to draw lines between them.

The New York Times
Art & Design

Art Review

The Audience as Art Movement
Ann Hamilton at the Park Avenue Armory



Philip Greenberg for The New York Times

The event of a thread Ann Hamilton's installation at the Park Avenue Armory features 42 swings, whose use by visitors agitates an immense curtain.

By [ROBERTA SMITH](#)

Published: December 6, 2012

The work is the latest from one of the more self-effacing orchestrators of installation-performance art, and her first new piece in New York in more than a decade. It centers on an immense, diaphanous white curtain strung across the center of the armory's 55,000-square-foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall. Dispersed on either side are 42 large wood-plank swings, suspended from the hall's elaborately trussed ceiling beams by heavy chains that are also tied to the rope-and-pulley system that holds up the curtain.

The swings are there for us, to swing on. "The people formerly known as the audience," [in the memorable words](#) of the media critic Jay Rosen, form a crucial ingredient of the work as never before in Ms. Hamilton's art. The piece has other components, about which more in a minute, but if people are not using the swings, "the event of a thread" does not fully exist. When they are in action, the curtain, made of a lightweight silk twill, rises and dips, and the air is stirred, causing further billowing and fluttering.

The swings, which are clearly not built for small children, are wide enough to accommodate two, or sometimes even three, adults or adolescents. At the opening on Tuesday evening, people

swung singly and in pairs, slow and low or higher and faster, often with helpful pushes from friends. The air filled with sounds of glee punctuated by cellphone rings, which actually sounded great in the general hubbub.

And in the middle of it all, the curtain, which resembles a low-cost indoor version of Christo and Jean-Claude's 1972 [land art piece "Valley Curtain,"](#) was doing its silent, discombobulated dance. In addition, if you paused in your swinging, you could feel the rest of the interconnected system pulse and gyrate, a momentary demonstration — at once silly and profound — that we are, indeed, all connected.

Whether all this makes good art, I'm not sure. I don't even know if this is art, participatory theater, a refreshing sociological experiment in how quickly adults will take up childish things, or perhaps a harbinger of the next fitness craze. Maybe it is Ms. Hamilton's belated entry into the audience-centered relational aesthetics phenomenon, a tendency that her earlier work presages.

The good news is that the piece seems to bring elements of unpredictability and even fun to a body of work that has often taken itself a bit too seriously. Ms. Hamilton, who represented the United States at the [Venice Biennale](#) in 1999, began her career as a weaver, earning a B.F.A. in textile design at the University of Kansas in 1979 before heading for Yale and an M.F.A. in sculpture. (In a sense she is still weaving, but in real time and space, combining objects, language and action so that they intersect suggestively and often poetically.)

In the early 1990s she became known for tightly controlled, sometimes hauntingly beautiful environments, where solitary performers conducted repetitive, even penitential tasks. "The event of a thread" may be a transitional work from which superior efforts will flow. But for now, the work is complexly participatory and makes wonderful use of the vast volume of the drill hall, from floor to roof, and encompasses experiences both active and contemplative. The swings and curtain are framed and enriched by typically Hamiltonian strands that can seem random and strange until you start weaving them together as you move through the piece. They include a flock of homing pigeons, 42 radios in paper bags that visitors can carry around and listen to, and two people broadcasting snippets of text over those radios.

Wearing woolly capes, these rotating "readers" — actors from the theater company [SITI](#) — are part of an especially striking tableau: They sit at a sturdy refectory table — handsomely honest, adamantly sculptural furniture is one of Ms. Hamilton's signatures — uncoiling long, scroll-like texts and murmuring into microphones while surrounded by the pigeons. (Unusually plump and beautiful, these birds seem crowded and at times stressed by their small, shared cages.)

The texts, which change daily, are by authors from Aristotle to Charles Darwin to the poet Ann Lauterbach, whose names are posted at the entrance.

At the other end of the hall, a solitary writer wearing a plain denim coat is seated at a second table with a pad of paper, jotting down whatever comes to mind. During the Tuesday opening a young writer named Audra Wolowiec was making a good start:

“Dear Lightness,” she began, “I was going to write to Weight but I decided to write to you instead. You are present in the room tonight. In rectangular strips outlining the paths of the swings overhead. As a feather, as a breath, a balloon. It is winter, but spring is in the air.”



Ann Hamilton’s ‘event of a thread’

Even at the opening on Tuesday, you could see visitors starting to use the piece as they wanted to. Lots of people were lying down on the floor directly beneath the curtain, watching it rise and fall, some while holding the radios close to their ears.

For a slightly more removed experience, you can sit (or lie) on dark-stained benches — similar in plainness to the tables — that line the side walls and, from there, observe the dispersed activities or listen to a radio. Ms. Hamilton has also created a window at street level on the Lexington Avenue side of the armory, so that pedestrians can look in, deciding perhaps if they want to pay the \$12 entrance fee.

Not all the strands of the piece are simultaneously available, or quite yet in place. In quieter moments you may be able to hear an unseen bellow attached in some way to the curtain that periodically wheezes and sighs melodically. The coos of the pigeons and the scratching of the writer, who works on a miked surface, are meant to be part of the sound mix broadcast over the radios, but may be audible only when attendance is sparser.

In addition, the pigeons are supposed to be released at the end of each day to fly around the space and “home” to a large cage at the back of the hall. But their training is proceeding, as someone knowledgeable on the subject put it, “on pigeon time,” so this may not occur until later in the run of the piece.

“The event of a thread” takes its title from the writings of the textile artist [Anni Albers](#). Fittingly, one of its best parts is a kind of fiber performance-art piece conducted high overhead: the movements of the elaborately rigged and intersecting ropes and chains of the swings and curtain, which crisscross the upper third of the space. The latest iteration of Ms. Hamilton’s origins as a weaver, this constellation of lines, of events of threads, shifts and slides in concert with the movements below, but at a remove, in its own universe.

Ann Hamilton—On Virtuality, Collaboration, and the Vocal Chord

Colette Copeland

For twenty-five years, internationally acclaimed artist Ann Hamilton has created multi-sensory installations invoking time, place, memory, history, and voice. I first encountered her work in 1998; mantle featured a seated woman (sometimes the artist herself) repetitively performing the domestic task of sewing. Behind her, a table stretched from one end of the room to the other, overflowing with an extravagant display of lush, rotting flowers. Speakers embedded in the flowers emitted a humming tonal sound. I had an experience of synesthesia, a condition in which the stimulation of one sensory function leads to an involuntary reaction in a second sensory pathway. I'm not sure if it was the smell of the flowers or the humming, but my entire body began to prickle. After a few moments, the feeling dissipated; soon my nervous system calmed. As I've followed Hamilton's work over the years, her engagement with the liminal through process and material never fails to immerse the viewer into a world both familiar and unsettling.

Over the past four years, Hamilton has worked on a number of projects. Commissioned by Steve Oliver and completed in 2007, Tower Project is located at Oliver Ranch in Geyserville, California. Hamilton worked with the Jensen architecture firm to design the site-specific artwork. Envisioned as a space for creative performance, the concrete tower has double-helix stairs. The open-air top allows the sky to reflect in a pool of water at the structure's base.

From 2005 to 2008, Hamilton designed the 118-foot meditation boat for the Sangha monks in Luang Prabang, Laos. Inspired by the monasteries' walking halls and the flow of the Mekong River, the boat was gifted in an official blessings ceremony in 2009. In 2008, Hamilton participated in Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet, a group project in the Galápagos Islands. Artists were asked to create work based on their travels and experiences to UNESCO World Heritage sites. Working with middle-school children in a collaborative reading/vocal performance documented by video, Hamilton's work addressed how a place is named and who has the power to name.

All images courtesy Ann Hamilton Studio unless otherwise indicated

The Pulitzer Foundation in St. Louis commissioned the multi-sensory installation stylus, which responds to Tadao Ando's architecture but also the larger context of St. Louis's urban environment and its social, political and cultural history. The work also poetically examines perception, communication, and the collective voice.

This interview took place January 29, 2011.

Colette Copeland: You spoke on "virtuality" at the University of Pennsylvania's Humanities Forum. The topic presented an interesting paradox, since your work is rooted in the physical and experiential.

Ann Hamilton: I agree. When I was first invited it gave me pause: How might I address or embody the topic? But as I began to think about the prosthetics of bodily extension and the immersions of screen experience in relation to the virtual, I thought about how the virtual inhabits even those experiences we might least associate with it. Like reading and the experience of proximity and distance that exists between the space where a reader sits and the world the page projects in the reader's mind. When I hear the word virtuality I immediately think of technology, of digital and electro-mechanical means, but this is maybe too narrow a form of address. Perhaps the question is how tactile or bodily knowledge comes forward to interact with technologies of extension.

CC: As the relationship between the physical and the virtual relates to installation-based work, the challenge is always about documentation. The first time I saw *mantle*, I was completely immersed in the multi-sensorial environment. I purchased the book *The Body and the Object: Ann Hamilton 1984–1996*, which included an interactive CD-ROM. I was able to navigate through layers of moving images and sounds. Although it didn't completely replace the physical experience, it did give viewers a sense of the complexity of your work.



AH: We are working on integrating sound and video into the experience of my personal site. In doing so, we find ourselves referring back to this CD-ROM, which was made under the auspices of my Wexner Center for the Arts residency from 1994 to 1996. The experience had a tremendous influence on my practice. *It made me think about how the camera apparatus is voyeuristic, and with it, how one's attention is guided from behind the mechanism rather than through one's direct physical experience of a space.* I began to move the camera in tandem with the movement of a stylus or the pressing of a finger to explore how it creates a visceral experience.

Above: *Figure 1. meditation boat, construction completed 2007; officially gifted to the Sangha, February 2009, in The Quiet in the Land, curated by France Morin, www.thequietintheland.org/laos/. Photo by Thibault Jeanson*

Opposite: *Figure 2. Face to Face 2, 2001, pigment print, 4 x 10 inches*

CC: So is virtuality about how to document your work or give the viewer an alternative viewing experience?

AH: Initially my intention was documentation; just as I work to find words to write or speak analogous to my making hand, I tried to use the video camera in parallel gestures to record a work from within the process and the actions of its making. The attempt to document became, in time, a way of making something new. Working on the CD-ROM caused me to think about immersion in a virtual space and immersion in the contingences of a particular physical space and time. The tension between the desire for material contact and the inevitable distance of a viewer that is part of the experience of an installation is, perhaps, both collapsed and amplified by its representation in an extended media form.

Language works in a similar way. How we name or describe our experience can also separate us from the experience. What was difficult to convey in the CD-ROM, or the virtual experience, was how the tactile aspects of the earlier installations evoked a psychological tension. The work pulls you in and pushes you out at the same time. That is both bodily and linguistic. Technology also does that. It pulls us in;

The work pulls you in and pushes you out at the same time. That is both bodily and linguistic. Technology also does that. It pulls us in; it connects us with proximity and an intimacy, yet at the same time, it asserts a distance. The paradox is a condition of both language and technology.—Hamilton



it connects us with proximity and an intimacy, yet at the same time, it asserts a distance. The paradox is a condition of both language and technology.

CC: In a 2001 interview, writer Mary Katherine Coffey asked you if your shift away from material and process-oriented work was due to the “Disneyfication” of large-scale installations prevalent in contemporary art. You responded:

I sometimes don't like the way my installations are becoming more technologically dependent. I've been concerned about the cost of some of the technologies that this work now needs; I can't afford them anymore. You know, it's really different than detritus that is collected, or materials that are borrowed and laid out and returned to their economy. I've entered a different economy. I depend on technologies that I don't always control or understand.... The material excess is perhaps very American, but does it eclipse what I'm actually doing? ⁵

You responded to this concern by making pinhole photographs with your mouth—a series that referenced old technology, but also reclaimed the body as a tool to counteract the reliance on technology

(Figure 2). How has your concern with technology affected and/or inspired your work?

AH: It's interesting that you bring up the pinhole images. I am working on a pinhole project at my son's school. Part of my interest in the pinhole is its simplicity and magic. The images hold durations of time. Perhaps I've revisited the pinhole because it provides a counterpoint to the other technologically complicated work. Yet the school pinhole project wouldn't work without the aid of technology. They work as images because we can scan them in, correct, and output them in multiple ways. It's a merger of nineteenth and twenty-first-century technologies.

I recently completed *stylus*, a very complex project at the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts in St. Louis (Figure 3). The Tadao Ando building is an architectural work of art in its own right. I couldn't address the project as in previous works where the spaces had former industrial or domestic histories. Its formal elegance and pristine surfaces made attaching to the building difficult. After several proposals, I understood that light is the animate figure in the building;



it mirrors the outside and reflects off the interior water court. Light animates the architecture; the architecture exists to choreograph the light. That directed my own research towards a project about light and sound not confined by material.

I collaborated with composer Shahrokh Yadegari, and we installed a multi-channel sound system in the building. It is a complex digital audio system that allowed sound to move and build through the space, reflecting the manner in which light transforms the architecture. We worked with soprano Elizabeth Zharoff, improvising with Shahrokh's digital instrument, Lila, to record her voice; we mixed these recordings with others we made of the sounds of two surfaces making contact. The project also had a tactile, material presence of jumping beans, taxidermy birds, newspapers, and player pianos. The technologies co-exist with the material of the installation, and the forms that emerge are only possible because of their intersection.

CC: Over the last few years, there has been a shift in your work, not only in the global scale of the projects, but also the emphasis towards

architecture. The tower in Geyserville illustrates this transition (Figure 4). While all your work responds to the history of a site, this work in particular required years of planning and collaboration. How do you negotiate the balance between the hands-on aspect of your practice and stepping back to allow others to fabricate or produce the final work?

AH: [Patron] Steve Oliver and I made a pact that we wouldn't make any major decisions by phone, fax, or email—only face to face. I went to California regularly. We forget that buildings are hand-made no matter how much computer modeling is involved. In this case, there was a lot of engineering work; though the form appears simple, the individual elements that comprise the interior radius change. As the stairs climb, the distance from the interior wall to each stair shifts, so each had to be slightly shorter than the one before it. The shifting diameter of the interior helix required the railing to be bent on-site. Every post in the railing inserts into an individual sleeve cast into the concrete. This would be impossible in a commercial building; it is too labor intensive.



The tower functions as an aperture; when you look down, the double helix of the stairs shifts in diameter; though different in scale, it is much like a lens and seems somehow related to the aperture of the pinhole....

Opposite: *Figure 3. stylus, 2010–2011, video installation, main gallery, The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, St. Louis. Photo by TOKY Branding + Design/Geoff Story*

Above: *Figure 4. tower, designed by Ann Hamilton for the Steve Oliver Ranch, Geyserville, California, completed 2007. Photo by Alex Fradkin. Photo courtesy of Oliver Ranch Foundation*

I am interested in responding to the physical and the social conditions of architecture; I don't have a form until the work meets the possibilities, restrictions, and complications of its location. In order to make the context for the work, I have to allow for conditions to happen—conditions that invite or allow other things to happen. Steve has commissioned other artists to create work for the space of the tower, so its context continually evolves. The tower functions as an aperture; when you look down, the double helix of the stairs shifts in diameter; though different in scale, it is much like a lens and seems somehow related to the aperture of the pinhole ... the extreme contrast in the work between the miniature and the gigantic.

CC: Although your collaborative process was very long and complex, the resulting project is minimalist. It is a response to water, light, and architecture with sound activating the space.

AH: I think of it as a vocal chord.

CC: You have said that your work has shifted towards the voice as central focus. Certainly, that theme is prevalent in *tower* and *stylus*.

AH: I'm interested in how to make a circumstance for a collective reading. For the closing of *stylus*, we built amplified speakers that resemble old glass telephone receivers. When you speak into the headset, the voice is amplified and vibrates as it projects from the speaker held within the palm of your hand. The slight amplification of a voice speaking softly has a different quality—a more interior quality—than a voice that attempts to project unamplified.

Connected to my question of the location of public space and public speech and how one might participate in the process are ideas philosophically situated in American history—my interest lies in creating a form for both a personal and a political voice, as well as the manners or conditions of speaking. Some questions are long term for me; this is a question I have been grappling with for, perhaps, fifteen years.

CC: Interviewer Jan Garden Castro asked you whether viewer participation changed with your global projects. You responded that your job was to listen and respond. This generosity of spirit is embodied in many of your projects but especially in *meditation boat* (Figures 1 and 5). Please expand on your collaborative process.

AH: In the Laos boat project, curator France Morin was responding to the enormous number of international shows where large numbers of artists are catapulted in, do their work, and then leave. France wanted the participating artists to stay longer, to let the projects grow through meaningful contact. For me, it was a four-year project. It wasn't feasible to be there during the entire boat building process, so there was a lot of emailing and Skyping. In some ways, the life of the project had two distinct phases: the first was its conception and building, the second was its gifting to the community. It's the only project that had a tangible object that remained after the exhibit

ended. Although the boat was blessed several times during its construction, it was a long process of giving it away, of understanding how to give it freely without expectation of function or attachment. This was completed on my last trip to Laos; in the gifting ceremony, it not only became something for use there, but perhaps also something for here. I recently ran into someone at a conference who said they saw my boat on the Mekong River. So it's there and in use. It's having its own life, which is very gratifying.

CC: With the Galápagos project, you involved local school children in a community collaborative process (Figure 6).

AH: I was interested in how the seventh and eighth graders at the UNESCO school where we worked would describe and name their islands and how this might be the same as or different from the evolution of vocabularies that have named and made it both a significant locus of scientific research as well as a mythical place in the world's imagination. I was interested in creating a vocal choir. What was most effective for the kids was not necessarily the speaking at the ocean (vocal choir), but rather the field trips we took together, going out on a boat and exploring their island. Many had never been on a boat, and though they are stewards of the island, they don't have access to many of the sites. We were in a place of extraordinary history and incredible beauty. The question was what could we do that was meaningful.

CC: A large percentage of our readership teaches as a means to support themselves and their artistic practice. While most are deeply committed to teaching, the number one complaint I hear is a lack of sufficient time to dedicate to their own practice. At this stage in your career, why do you continue to teach? What role does teaching play in your own practice?

AH: I'm fortunate that my teaching appointment is flexible with my schedule; I work primarily with graduate students. I teach in part because I need to financially. Installations are expensive to make and without marketable objects, there's not a lot to sell. That's the reality. But teaching is also a way of making a context for and cultivating a conversation. I feel very lucky to have the job I have. It does take a lot of time—emotional time. But it keeps me involved in something that I care about. I enjoy the studio visits with the grads. They are very committed to their work. I'm able to structure the seminars around questions that I am also asking in my own work. I never teach the class the same way twice. University galleries and programs focus on the professionalism of the artists, but they also provide opportunities where other work (not tied to the market) is supported.

Opposite: *Figure 5. meditation boat, construction completed 2007; officially gifted to the Sangha, February 2009, in The Quiet in the Land. curated by France Morin. Photo by Thibault Jeanson*





Figure 6. Ann working with children, *Galápagos Chorus*, 2008. An installation of the documentation of Hamilton's work in the Galápagos was included in *Human/Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet*, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, University of California, and Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Photo by Emily Pozo

CC: My students keep me on my toes and prevent me from becoming intellectually or creatively lazy.

AH: They keep you honest.

CC: How do you juggle the various demands of international travel and global art making with parenting and teaching?

AH: It's complicated. I wonder if I'm doing any of it well. My attention is always focused on the work. I'm often dealing with many projects at once. So I have to think of it as one big project. My son tells me that I work all the time. Rather than separating my work and life, I think of it as one entity. I'm also traveling less internationally. But you should see our house. It's chaos. I have great help. It can be stressful, but I can't imagine not doing this.

CC: The Pulitzer Foundation's mission is to provide a sanctuary and laboratory for cultivating collaborative work. Those two words seem to epitomize your work and practice. Yet the viewer is not allowed to become complacent. In so many works, the viewer is required to activate the space. The laboratory is not a sterile environment, but rather one where the creative spirit flourishes.

AH: It's a space of abstraction with a poetic relationship. One that's not necessarily functional.

CC: You've said that your work engages the place of inbetweenness. Perhaps that is the space between visibility and invisibility, or the space between knowledge and intuition, or the space between personal and collective memory.

AH: It's about bringing something to attention. ~~It's not about a resolution or answer, but more about how to bring the question into an experience.~~ For example, the Pulitzer's interior resembles a temple—pristine and elegant. But outside is an urban neighborhood that historically has experienced a lot of racial tension and physical abandonment. How does one reconcile everything that goes into making a space of interiority that simultaneously brushes up against the harsh reality of the exterior? I never know how things will unfold or amplify after I've left. I have to trust the power of the experiential. My attraction to making social choirs is not about coming together as one voice, but highlighting individual voices collectively.

I am haunted by choirs of readers speaking, and I am getting ready to begin a large project at the Henry Art Gallery in Seattle. During a site visit, I met with a young professor who teaches conducting, Giselle Wyers, and videotaped her class from a camera attached to her chest facing out toward her hands and the student singers. The project is still in its beginning stages. I'm not sure where it will lead, but the question of the singular conductor and the body of the choir is intriguing to me.

1. Mary Katherine Coffey, "Histories That Haunt: A Conversation with Ann Hamilton," *Art Journal* 60:3 (Autumn 2001), 11–23.

"Everywhere and nowhere" – Robert Ayers in conversation with Ann Hamilton

Posted By [admin](#) On March 16, 2009 @ 10:21 am In

[Archive, Artists, Books, Interviews, Museums, Performance Art](#) | [Comments Disabled](#)



[1]

Ann Hamilton, "human carriage" (2009) Photo: The 3rd Heat on flickr

I'm happy to admit that Ann Hamilton is one of my favorite artists. And, as of this moment, she is the first artist to be represented twice in that long list of interviews in the left sidebar of this page. Ms Hamilton is one of the most intelligent and inquisitive individuals I have ever met, but her work is as intriguing physically as it is intellectually stimulating. And this is true whether she is making large-scale installations, or exquisitely crafted objects that you can pick up in your fingers. No matter how well I have come to know her work, or how long I have been looking at it, I have never found her predictable. In fact the reverse is true: every encounter with a new Hamilton piece brings with it the pleasure of surprise, and the sense that she has made an unexpected move. The latest such experience was discovering *human carriage*, installed in the rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum as part of "The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989," which, when I wrote about it [here](#) ^[2] I called "one of the most remarkable pieces of site-specific art ever created."

Ms Hamilton's formal description of *human carriage* reads "Installation of cloth, wire, bells, books, string, pipe, pulleys, pages, cable, gravity, air, and sound," and the Guggenheim describes its working thus: "Hamilton devises a mechanism that traverses the entire Guggenheim balustrade, taking the form of a white silk 'bell carriage' with Tibetan bells attached inside. As the cage spirals down along the balustrade, the purifying bells ring, awakening viewers. The mechanism is hoisted back up to a post at the uppermost Rotunda Level 6, where an attendant exchanges weights composed of thousands of cut-up books that

counter the pulley system that propels the mechanism itself." That about describes it I suppose, but it doesn't begin to suggest what a beautiful, evocative work this is. All I can say is, if you're in New York City before the show closes April 19, go and see it!



[3]

Ann Hamilton

Ann Hamilton's work is also on exhibition at Gemini at Joni Moisant Weyl, and this Thursday, March 19, the gallery is hosting a reception and book signing for the new catalog of Ms Hamilton's Gemini projects that has been written by Joan Simon. (Joan Simon also collaborated with Ann Hamilton on the wonderful little book *An Inventory of Objects* published by Gregory R. Miller in 2006, which was the starting point for the ARTINFO interview mentioned above. If you don't already own it, you can buy it here: [Ann Hamilton: An Inventory of Objects](#) ^[4])

I spoke to Ms Hamilton almost a month after "The Third Mind" opened (she'd been working in Laos in the interim) but I began by recalling the very beginning of the show.

Ann, can you tell me first of all about the physical installation of *human carriage*? On the day "The Third Mind" opened I remember you were still there trying to get it just right.

I had such a great time making this piece, but it wasn't an easy piece to make, believe me. My engineer Marty Chafkin, who has been so central to all of this happening, is still there now, fine-tuning it. We understood the principal of it and we'd tested it, but until you run it full-scale it's very theoretical. If we'd been able to build a full-scale model of the Guggenheim and test it, it would have been different. But we had to do a lot of fine tuning to get the weight, the momentum, and the balance of it right. It's all dependent on gravity. The bell carriage follows the angle of the parapet wall as it comes down, but it has to take a steep descent to begin with and then it has to be able to maintain enough momentum to get around the parts where the descent levels out.

pipe the minute it came back up. There came to be an expectation of its performance and we came to understand that it was too frequent and it needed to come without demand or expectation! Also, we didn't want it to seem that the intention of the cycle is to transfer all of the books at the top to the bottom. It's goal is more one of attention than of moving the stacks of books. But of course we are such a goal-oriented culture!



[6]

Ann Hamilton, "human carriage" (2009) Photo: The 3rd Heat on flickr

You also refer to the attendant as "The Reader". Why is that?

She's called "The Reader" partly because of the history of the project: I was originally working with the bibliography of the show, and thinking that I might sit in the space and read all the books in the bibliography during the exhibition. So there would literally be a reader present. I soon realized that I didn't just want to read, the piece is still trying to materialize one of the phenomena of reading. So while they're not literally reading, they deploy a system that stands in for the experience of reading.

What happens when you read? So often we read out of context, or misread things, and I started wondering how you could trace the influence of a particular line or section of text as it passes through all the other things you're reading and being influenced by. How do you account for an influence that comes through a process that changes you forever but doesn't leave a physical trace? When something is a cultural influence that is everywhere and nowhere, how do you speak to the experience of that influence?

pipe the minute it came back up. There came to be an expectation of its performance and we came to understand that it was too frequent and it needed to come without demand or expectation! Also, we didn't want it to seem that the intention of the cycle is to transfer all of the books at the top to the bottom. It's goal is more one of attention than of moving the stacks of books. But of course we are such a goal-oriented culture!



[6]

Ann Hamilton, "human carriage" (2009) Photo: The 3rd Heat on flickr

You also refer to the attendant as "The Reader". Why is that?

She's called "The Reader" partly because of the history of the project: I was originally working with the bibliography of the show, and thinking that I might sit in the space and read all the books in the bibliography during the exhibition. So there would literally be a reader present. I soon realized that I didn't just want to read, the piece is still trying to materialize one of the phenomena of reading. So while they're not literally reading, they deploy a system that stands in for the experience of reading.

What happens when you read? So often we read out of context, or misread things, and I started wondering how you could trace the influence of a particular line or section of text as it passes through all the other things you're reading and being influenced by. How do you account for an influence that comes through a process that changes you forever but doesn't leave a physical trace? When something is a cultural influence that is everywhere and nowhere, how do you speak to the experience of that influence?



[7]

Ann Hamilton, "human carriage" (2009) Photo: The 3rd Heat on flickr

And this is why you use the books, obviously. Why are they cut into pieces?

Initially we were working with these indigo-dyed texts that we were going to tie to the bell carriage, so that lines of text would actually pass through the show, but that was much too literal. We all read pretty eclectically and across subjects, and what happens when you slice through a book is almost analogous to what happens when you read things. There's something that you take away from that particular slice-through of a work that becomes a catalyst for a thought, an experience, or a perception. So I thought if we took all these cross-sections of all these different books it would suggest how reading accumulates in us. It's the collectivity of these bodies of knowledge in book form that become the counter-weights for the bells: the silence of reading and the weight of the books meets the sound and the lightness of the bells. It's like the trade-off between what we know through language and what we know through our tactile, sensory experience.



[8]

Ann Hamilton, "human carriage" (2009) Photo: The 3rd Heat on flickr

And there are also tiny strips of paper in with the books as well.

That's really important, because they're the lines of text that fall out from the books. It seems to me that influence happens by things falling out of what you're reading, and falling into your attention.

The catalog calls *human carriage* a "response" to the rest of "The Third Mind". Can you explain that?

Everything I make is a response to a situation, so this is a response, but it didn't really start out that way. When I made my first visit to Alexandra [Munroe - the show's curator] a couple of years ago, she suggested I use one of the rooms in another part of the building to make an installation, but I didn't want to be in an enclosed room, because I didn't want to be isolated. So very early on the project came to be about my response to the history and influence of translated texts which were central to a cultural transmission that had been a major influence on visual artists, and also my response to the the architecture and its absorption of that history. One of the qualities I find brilliant is how it renders your body totally active because you can never really settle into level planes and perpendicular relationships. If you think about it, human carriage has no physical form until it literally meets the building.



[9]

Ann Hamilton, "human carriage" (2009) Photo: The 3rd Heat on flickr