

**PLAYGROUND OF FAILURE**

**BAD JOKES AND OTHER  
FORMS OF RESISTANCE**



# Playground of Failure, Bad Jokes and Other Forms of Resistance

Sophie Sutherland

2021

Exegesis in support of practice-based Thesis

Master of Visual Arts

School of Art and Design

Auckland University of Technology



# ***ABSTRACT***

This practice-led project explores the lengths that failure can be used as a sculptural tactic. The modalities of failure and success are positioned as examples of dualistic norms that create prejudice and competitive expectations. Installation practices explore the potential of failure through the relationships between objects, material, and action. Utilising an amateur methodology and provisional methods that celebrate failure, possibilities of refusal against normal modes of value arise. Through strategies of repetition, diagrams, queering, and play, I have explored the potential of labour, failure, and humour as forms of resistance to heteronormative value production.



# ***CONTENTS***

<b>ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>INTRO: CROUCHING, STRETCHING, LEANING</b>	<b>pg 1</b>
<b>INITIAL PROCESSES: CRAWLING, WALKING, RUNNING</b>	<b>pg 6</b>
Level 4 Lockdown	
Potential, Performance and Activation	
Immersive Installation	
<b>METHODOLOGY(S): TUNNELLING, PIPING, SLIDING</b>	<b>pg 20</b>
Thresholds, Window Frames, Panes	
Glitches, Cracks and the Processual Advantages of an	
Amateurish Art Practice	
Diagrammatic Sculpture	
<b>FAILURE, QUEERNESS &amp; REPETITION: PARKS, SCHOOLS, MALLS</b>	<b>pg 31</b>
Potential of Failure	
Queer Objects, Queer Spaces & Repetition	
<b>MORE METHODS AND PROCESSES: DIGGING, STACKING, PILING, PUSHING</b>	<b>pg 42</b>
Playing with Provisionality	
Effort, Support & Humour	
<b>CONCLUSION: SCRAPING, THIRSTING, EXHAUSTING</b>	<b>pg 48</b>
<b>DOCUMENTATION OF FINAL SHOW</b>	<b>pg 50</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>pg 60</b>



## ***ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP***

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

***SIGNED:***

***DATE:***

20/05/2021



# ***LIST OF FIGURES***

- Figure 1 Sophie Sutherland, Sketch of *False Step*, 2020.
- Figure 2 Sophie Sutherland, *False Step*, wood and rubber tyre inner tube, August 2020.
- Figure 3 Sophie Sutherland, Images from @suthsuthsuth Instagram page, 2020-2021. <https://www.instagram.com/suthsuthsuth/?hl=en>.
- Figure 4 Scans from *Do It*, collected and edited by Hans Ulrich Obrist, 1997 (left: pg 298, Martha Rosler, *Instruction*, 2000, "Chicken in Coca-Cola Sauce", and "Mexican Coca-Cola Muffins." Right: pg 295, Pipilotti Rist, *Neighbour Piece*, 1996) Ulrich Obrist, Hans. *Do It*. Independent Curators International, 2013.
- Figure 5 Sophie Sutherland, *The Alfa Project*, March 2020. These lists were made in reaction to reading George Perec's *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, 1997.
- Figure 6 Sophie Sutherland, *Gift Box*, plywood, steel, naughtical cable, installation view, August 2020.
- Figure 7 Sophie Sutherland, *Gift Box*, plywood, steel, naughtical cable, installation view, August 2020.
- Figure 8 Franz Erhard Walther. *The New Alphabet*, installation view, Franz Erhard Walther: *The Body Decides* at WIELS, Brussels. Photo by Sven Laurent. <https://www.dailyserving.com/2015/11/franz-erhard-walther-and-pae-white-at-the-henry-art-gallery/>.
- Figure 9 Sophie Sutherland, *Myself in 'rock mode' in my studio*, 2021, Photo by Monique Redmond.
- Figure 10 Documentation of Bianca Hester's exhibition *Please leave these windows open overnight to enable the fans to draw in cool air during the early hours of the morning*, 2010. <https://acca.melbourne/exhibition/bianca-hester-please-leave-these-windows-open-overnight-to-enable-the-fans-to-draw-in-cool-air-during-the-early-hours-of-the-morning/>.



- Figure 11 Sophie Sutherland, *Ball Park*, The Audio Foundation, 2020, installation view, Photo by Sam Longmore.
- Figure 12 Sophie Sutherland, installation view of vinyl lists, *Ball Park*, The Audio Foundation, 2020. Photo by Sam Longmore.
- Figure 13 Alicia Frankovich, *WE ARE HOUSED (in and around this stuff)*, 2005, installation view. <http://www.physicsroom.org.nz/exhibitions/we-are-housed-in-and-around-all-of-this-stuff>.
- Figure 14 Mark Schroder, *Bureau of Happiness*, Gus Fisher Gallery, 2021, installation detail. Photo by Sophie Sutherland.
- Figure 15 Mark Schroder, *Bureau of Happiness*, Gus Fisher Gallery, 2021, installation detail. Photo by Sophie Sutherland.
- Figure 16 Richard Linklater, *Slacker*, 1990, film still, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-U\\_l1DCGEY&t=758s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-U_l1DCGEY&t=758s).
- Figure 17 Sophie Sutherland, still from *Baskets*, 2020.
- Figure 18 Paul Cullen, *Desert Diagrams*, 2016, Los Angeles. <https://www.paulcullenarchive.org/work/desert-diagrams>.
- Figure 19 Sophie Sutherland, *Pool Side(s)*, ceramic, dimensions variable, 2020.
- Figure 20 Sophie Sutherland, *Stack Shelf*, wood, perspex, and ceramic, 1200mm x 380mm x 380mm, May, 2021, close up view.
- Figure 21 Sophie Sutherland, prototype of *Stack Shelf*, March 2021.
- Figure 22 Sophie Sutherland, *Stack Shelf* frame, iroko wood, April 2021.
- Figure 23 Sophie Sutherland, pinkysill remnants, 2021.
- Figure 24 Sophie Sutherland, one part of the straight block mould, plaster and pinkysil, 2020.



- Figure 25 Sophie Sutherland, one part of the curved block mould, plaster and pinkysil, 2020.
- Figure 26 Eva Hesse, *Test Piece(s)*, displayed in the exhibition Studiowork at Camden Art Centre, 2010. <http://thisistomorrow.info/articles/eva-hesse-studiowork>.
- Figure 27 Sophie Sutherland, *Wall Piece*, 2021.
- Figure 28 Sophie Sutherland, iterations of *Wall Piece*, installation view from Talk Day.
- Figure 29 Sophie Sutherland, iterations of *Wall Piece*, installation view from Talk Day.
- Figure 30 Alicia Frankovich, *Flying Fox*, 2008, documentation of performance.
- Figure 31 Sophie Sutherland, *A4 table #1 feat limpet*, 2021.
- Figure 32 Sophie Sutherland, *A4 table #2*, 2021.
- Figure 33 Sophie Sutherland, *limpets*, ceramic, 2021, installation details.
- Figure 34 Making the *limpets* in the Wet Lab at AUT, Photo by Harriet Stockman.
- Figure 35 Sophie Sutherland, Talk Day installation (*Untitled*), Feb 2021, installation view.
- Figure 36 Sophie Sutherland, Skip on Galatos St, April 2021.
- Figure 37 Celine Condorelli, *Tools for Imagination (1:1)*, installation view, Equipment, Significant Other, Vienna, 2019. Photo by Manuel Carreon Lopez. <https://artviewer.org/celine-condorelli-at-significant-other/>.
- Figure 38 Lucy Meyle, *Does a Flower Rehearse for Spring?*, ST PAUL Street Gallery, 2018. <https://mayfairartfair.com/artists/lucy-meyle/>.
- Figure 39 Lucy Meyle, *Does a Flower Rehearse for Spring?*, ST PAUL Street Gallery, 2018. <https://mayfairartfair.com/artists/lucy-meyle/>.
- Figure 40 Layne Waerea, *Free Excuses*, ST PAUL Street Gallery, 2014 <https://laynewaerea.wordpress.com/2013/12/18/free-excuses/>.



# ***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

Thank you, Mon and Chris, for being my supervision dream team, helping me over the hurdles, and fitting in a lot of laughs along the way.

Thank you to all the artists, researchers, and practitioners who made this exegesis possible.

Thank you, Harriet, Angus, Glenn, Harold, Mike, and Matt, for the technical guidance and patience.

Thank you, Lindsey, for being team leader in helpful distraction and co-operative procrastination.

Thank you, Sam, for proofreading my writing and giving enthusiastic and loving feedback.

Thank you, Mum and Dad, for asking questions and having pride in my relentless pursuit of failure.

Thank you, Evelyn, for being my rock.



# ***INTRO: CROUCHING, STRETCHING, LEANING***

*Playground of Failure, Bad Jokes and Other Forms of Resistance* is a practice-led project that playfully explores failure and its potential in resisting normative productions of value. I see failure as the instigator for revealing structures of value and expectation in my project. For me, the dualistic nature of failure and success lessens dexterity in how I negotiate the subjective experience of these concepts. I am intrigued by the multiplicity of failure and success amongst many dualistic characteristics of everyday life. "Between the two subjective poles of success and failure lies a space of potential where paradox rules and where transgressive activities can refuse dogma and surety."<sup>1</sup> This quote from English Writer, Lisa Le Feuvre articulates how my project has been exploring the richness of potential that resides in celebrating failure.

Applying an amateur methodology as the underpinning approach, I allow myself the right to experiment, play, and be messy with the methods and decisions I choose. I work in the flow of contingencies in a deliberately improvisational way that does not strive to be the flashiest or boldest. There is a happenstance that occurs, which I rely upon and consider to be a helpful tool when it comes to processual decision making. It involves being intuitive and improvising with provisional methods of material collection and realising the relationships between object, material and environment.

One of the first objects I made at the beginning of this project was a set of stairs, which I titled *False Step*. The materials were all sourced freely

---

<sup>1</sup> Lisa Le Feuvre, *If at first you don't succeed, celebrate failure*, Tate Etc, Issue 18, Spring 2010. <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-18-spring-2010/if-first-you-dont-succeed-celebrate>. Accessed 18/05/21.



from the 3D labs and appeared fit for another purpose.<sup>2</sup> This method of collection connects my practice to items of the found everyday and communicates a sense of improvisation.

By choosing to use material offcuts or waste products, I utilise discarded materials that have been deemed excess or unwanted. These redundant items hold a material failure that I harness in making sculptural objects, thus exploring ways of imbuing the material with value and new life. I tend to see materials and objects as starting points that I gather inspiration from. The interactive or activational elements of sculpture have always interested me.<sup>3</sup> *False Step* led to thinking about sculptures as being prop-like and something that could perhaps stand-in for a body through the suggestion of action.

Initially, I wanted the work to be activated by the viewer stepping onto the stairs and experiencing bemusement as the step returned to the floor instead of holding up the participant's weight. However, the outcome of the work was decidedly not interactive as it was unstable due to the joining system of the stretchy cut tyre strips. Rather than regarding the lack of interactivity as an end point to the object, I was interested in how the stairs could explore a richness of failure, especially as the work still retained a sense of action and humour. In this state of diagram or prototype, I noticed that *False Step* held failure at bay in a state of potentiality. By creating objects that seem like they have functionality

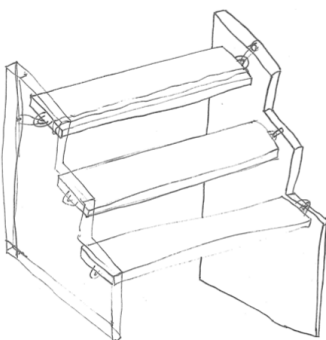


Figure 1, sketch of *False Step*, 2020.

---

2 The AUT 3D labs include the main lab where woodwork and metalwork occur. A wall design was installed in another building, and the offcuts were offered to the lab as extra material.

3 See artists such as David Cross and Franz Erhard-Walther who demonstrate the use of material reliance on a human participant in order for a work to be realised. Laresa Kosloff's collaborative work with Andy Thomson, *The Green Text*, also has a semi-activational aspect in its encounter as the audience must don a headset to listen to commentary that directly references the site of the lawn bowling green where the work is viewed. The pair use humour in an almost slapstick way to comment on views of the artworld and philosophy through an extended lens of the lawn bowl sport. The viewer therefore constructs the work through the framing of the sound piece and their present experience of the 'real' game in front of them. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMAMGw62pIQ&ab\\_channel=acca\\_melbourne](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMAMGw62pIQ&ab_channel=acca_melbourne).





Figure 2, *False Step*, August 2020.



and interactive characteristics and then removing that aspect, the artwork becomes inoperable yet still operates in relationship to action and the environment they are presented within. This became something I continued exploring throughout the project. There is a sculptural joke in the precarity and curiosity that arises from this method. When the physical functionality of the stairs was removed, both visual and conceptual functionalities were gained.

Along with this approach, I have found that repetition has become a recurring mode of making for me. With an amateur methodology, a material trust and sense of middle ground are found with making in multiple. There is more freedom and play in the capabilities of many objects as units versus a single object. With an intention of repeating with difference, value is not stressed by accuracy but expands with each iteration, which could lead to re-thinking of everyday labour.<sup>4</sup> Through repetitious methods of making, such as casting, I can achieve installation possibilities that I see as being similar to drawing. The central context of this project has been situated in games and play where a competitive aspect is often depicted in the forefront, which I aim to subvert through methods of queering and an amateur methodology.<sup>5</sup> The diagrammatic and provisional nature of the methods I employ creates a temporal characteristic fed by this methodology. Therefore, I am able to try new things as I'm always in a state of proposition. Writer Lisa Le Feuvre questions:

What happens...when artists use failure to propose a resistant view of the world, when failure is released from being a judgmental term, and success deemed overrated?<sup>6</sup>

---

4 Jeff Collins and Bill Mayblin, *Derrida for Beginners*, 1996.

5 I am using the term queering as a method that relates to queer (LGBTQI+ community, marginalization, and what is marked as unusual). I have explored queering as a tactic that claims space for queer objects to sit comfortably in, this might be through a skewing of expectation, horizontal hierarchy, and material friendship.

6 Lisa Le Feuvre, *If at first you don't succeed, celebrate failure*, Tate Etc, Issue 18, Spring 2010. <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-18-spring-2010/if-first-you-dont-succeed-celebrate>. Accessed 18/05/21.



With provisional processes of making, I have considered ways that failure can be utilised as a mechanism of resisting and revealing heteronormative modes of production regarding social spaces, structures, and value. I have been researching the connections between queerness and failure and how I could 'queer' space to produce an installation where a series of objects put value on inclusivity and equivalence. By queering space through object making, I aim to push against or aggravate the boundaries and structures of conventional heteronormative environments and behaviour, revealing the restrictive norms of oppression. Amongst these behaviours is the act and application of hierarchies. I aim to create a horizontally systemised way of approaching my topics (failure, queerness, play, resistance). With the work I have been producing, there is an equivalence or reliance that the objects share. A friendship of material, object, and space is inferred in this strategy that rejects hierarchical structuring. I am interested in investigating this relationship between body, object, and material within installation. I am intrigued by the conversation of objects performing as apparatus and the dialogue in their materiality and function. There is a labour in the action that comes with the functionality that some objects hold or withhold. Effort and labour are present in the making of the work. It varies in visible and invisible labour due to the marks and gestures that carry through into the diagrams, casts, and hand-made objects I produce. Along with this effort, there is a lightness apparent in the playfulness and humour dotted throughout the terrain of my work.

In this exegesis, I will expand on what I have touched on in this Introduction by providing a narrative of events (the pandemic, performances, research) that shaped the decisions made throughout the project. Discussing the processes and methods that unfolded, I will go into detail about the work and other artist's practices that have been integral to my research development. Outlining my methodological choices I will break down how I have been thinking about failure, queerness, the diagrammatic, and repetition.



# ***INITIAL PROCESSES: CRAWLING, WALKING, RUNNING***

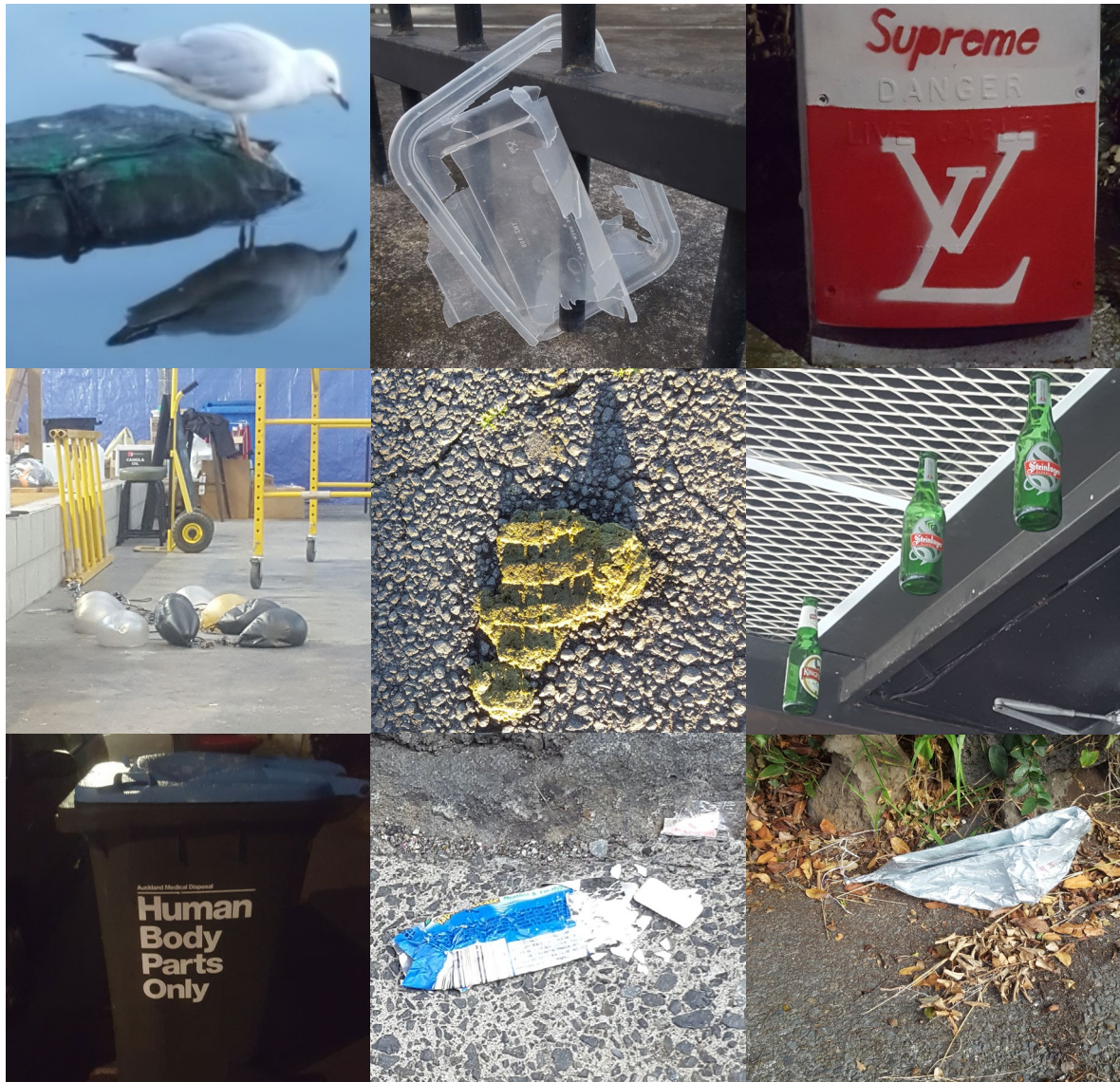


Figure 3, Images from @suthsuthsuth Instagram page, 2020-2021.



## LEVEL 4 LOCKDOWN

When COVID-19 lockdown was enforced in Auckland, I made sure not to burden myself with anxiety over not making objects in the labs at AUT.<sup>7</sup> I took the time to observe the surrounding landscape of my suburban home and ‘go with the flow’ by engaging with contingent and provisional making. With my daily walks, I decided to make a project Instagram page (@suthsuthsuth) dedicated to the documentation of moments of failure, unease, or humour that I found in objects or occurrences in an urban setting. At the time, my car had recently broken down. It was parked down the road, so I decided to use it as a vehicle-sized gallery, *The Alfa Project*, sticking poster images, shopping lists, and signage onto the interior windows. I loved thinking about how people might walk past the car and peer in to see what the images might be. In parallel, I played as many board games as my flatmates could cope with, and the effect was that my work took up aspects of play and social games. The subsequent lockdowns and associated activities set up my project with an open and provisional character that made me observe and reflect upon the expansive way I make connections, utilising methods of play and improvisation with environments and materials at hand.

I often kept my eye out during my walks for free fruit from neighbour’s trees or anything strange or confounding for my Instagram page. On one of these days, I came across a box labelled ‘FREE BOOKS.’ Rifling excitedly through this small treasure trove, I came across *The Book of Lists 2*.<sup>8</sup> I was delighted to find this gem, having discussed lists and our enthusiasm for them earlier that week with Mon (Monique Redmond, one of my supervisors). I pulled a few pages of lists out of the book and put them in the interior of the Alfa Romeo. The lists included: “The 25 All-Time Box-Office Champion Films (Adjusted for Inflation)”,

---

7 The whole of Aotearoa self-isolated in level 4 lockdown from 25th March 2020 for six-weeks.

8 Irving Wallace, David Wallechinsky, Amy Wallace and Sylvia Wallace, *The People’s Almanac Presents The Book of Lists 2*, 1981: Bantam Books.



“10 Unusual Objects Offered at Auction”, and “5 Unusual Dolphin Incidents.” The absurd or obscure topics of the lists led me to play with language and diagrams through sets of instructions similar to those in the *Do It* project.<sup>9</sup> There are many instructions or lists amongst the *Do It* project that utilise drawing and humour often encouraging experiences that would not likely occur in the everyday.

9. Adapted from Graham, *Classic Cooking with Coke*, p. 27.

#### Chicken in Coca-Cola Sauce<sup>9</sup>

350 to 400 pounds dioxin chicken, cut up  
25 cups salt and 5 cups pepper  
3 gallons olive oil  
12 cups butter or margarine  
100 pounds fresh mushrooms, sliced  
100 cups chopped spring onions  
30 bulbs of garlic, diced very fine  
25 to 30 cups flour  
11 gallons Coca-Cola  
20 gallons chicken broth  
4 pounds of fresh parsley  
100 bay leaves  
4 cups rosemary

Dry chicken with paper towels. Season with salt and pepper. Heat oil and butter in 25 very large cast-iron skillets. Add chicken pieces and cook until golden on one side. Turn and cook other side until golden. Chicken will have to be cooked in batches. Place on separate platters and set aside.

In the same pan, add mushrooms; cook over medium heat until golden. Add onion and garlic and cook, stirring until softened. Sprinkle flour into pan, and cook, while stirring, until a light color (1-2 minutes). Add Coca-Cola, broth, and herbs. Stir to blend. Cook 4-5 minutes. Put sauce into large cooking pots (400-600 quarts) and bring to boil. Add chicken pieces to pot. Cover, reduce heat to simmer, cook for 25-30 minutes or until tender.

Remove chicken from pots, arrange on platters. Skim fat.

- Read newspaper
- Spring from chair and let the opened newspaper lie on the table
- Run for your life around your best friend's house
- Whistle and throw a stone up against her window
- Wait till she opens the window
- Shout up to her that our common idol has died
- Cry together

Figure 4, scans from *Do It*, collected and edited by Hans Ulrich Obrist, 1997 (left: Pipilotti Rist, Neighbour Piece, 1996, right: Recipe for Chicken in Coca-Cola Sauce). © fair use.

9 The *Do It* project is an online project with a variety of contributors as well as being compiled and edited into book form by Hans Ulrich Obrist.





Figure 5, *The Alfa Project*, March 2020. These lists were made in reaction to reading George Perec's *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, 1997.



The Alfa Romeo was eventually towed away, and recycling the contents of the car, I was left only with an almost complete *Book of Lists 2*. Curious about the book's family of authors, and wanting to know if there was a Book of Lists 3, I researched them further. The Wallace's had collaborated on the first *Book of Lists* together in 1977 and on *The Intimate Sex Lives of Famous People* in 1981. Each with their own reasonably long and committed writing careers, they seemed to be a family who persisted tirelessly in their writing.<sup>10</sup> It made me wonder had they succumbed to the rigmarole of competitive American productivism? The scandalous and humorous topics they chose to write about led me to think that about the scope of humour and how it can be used as a tactic toward frivolity. The relevance of this family and why I am writing about them lies in this space of middle ground. It is like being in the middle of the bell curve, the median, or average heights. The Wallace family no doubt loved writing and put considerable effort into it. While this effort is immense, there is still a sense of obscurity retained, and with this, freedom of play. This is what I am interested in: a space of freedom that comes with obscurity. Whether it be in humour, failure, or mediocrity, I am curious to explore this ambiguous space.

---

10 Thomas Lask, *Publishing: Irving Wallace and his Write-On Family*, The New York Times, 1976. <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/10/01/archives/publishing-irving-wallace-and-his-writeon-family.html>.



## POTENTIAL, PERFORMANCE AND ACTIVATION



Figures 6, *Gift Box*, August 2020, installation view.

After lockdown ended in late May 2020 and the studios reopened, I began making hand-made objects again in the labs. I wanted to create objects that retained action. I made a series of short provisional works that included *False Step*, two ceramic pools (*Pool Side*), and *Gift Box*, a series of rectangular wooden boxes with sliding lids. The ten boxes have the dimensions of a gift box for two wine bottles. I had been thinking about futility and the labour involved in gifts. I engraved each of the sliding lids with laser cut diagrams and the phrase like “kitset for failure,” “kitset for redundancy,” or “kitset for possibilities.” I wanted to use the context of the gift to introduce a questioning of how and what is celebrated. The language of kitset implies there is learning involved. By making the kitsets futile (empty and using words like redundancy and failure), I suggest the possibility that they are providing a rethinking of learning. Failure becomes something to aspire to and that which is redundant or futile becomes the best outcome.





Figure 7, *Gift Box*, installation view.

To quote Gertrude Stein “a real failure does not need an excuse, it is an end in itself.”<sup>11</sup> I am using the term redundancy in this writing alongside futility and failure. Relating to a loss or something missing in the system, I am signifying a re-thinking of the boundaries of how these terms are perceived and what systems they are indulging or refuting.<sup>12</sup> Here, language is a determining factor that allows resistance to social norms prevalent values and aspirations.

---

11 Gertrude Stein Quotes. [BrainyQuote.com](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/author/gertrude-stein), BrainyMedia Inc, 2021.

12 Francis Alys is an artist who has explored redundancy through documentation and performance. See his work *El Ensayo (The Rehearsal)*.





Figure 8, Franz Erhard Walther. *The New Alphabet*, installation view. Franz Erhard Walther: *The Body Decides* at WIELS, Brussels, 2014.

The German artist Franz Erhard Walther's 2014 work, *The New Alphabet*, explores the limitations of installation. His work demonstrates how sculpture, drawing, and performance can blend together in an expansive field of connectivity. The work is activated by performers, public participants, and in some cases, the artist himself.<sup>13</sup> His work reconfigures the inherent relationships of the artist, work, and viewer by creating a sensory distribution of experience that points to the context and space that the work is held. Like Walther's work using fabric to consider action, language, and the body, I aim to explore ways that objects suggest action. Walther's pieces are developed from drawings and then translated into diagrammatic sculpture. Thinking about this work drew me to consider scale, materials, and an extended idea of object as body or object as language. The costume I made for becoming a rock is an example of how I considered Walther's work, but in this case, it is activated by passivity. The effort required to do nothing or be

---

13 Haus Der Kunst, 2020, Youtube [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPz-tnYce7H8&ab\\_channel=HausderKunst](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPz-tnYce7H8&ab_channel=HausderKunst).



still and pretend to be a rock does require strain from the body.<sup>14</sup> This work outlines the failure and humour in acting as an object. My rock costume nods to the use of rocks within art history and humorously plays with the language surrounding it, as (linguistically defined) the atoms that make up rocks are classified as individuals.<sup>15</sup> With the rock costume, there is an interpretation of stillness and invisible labour. I see the costume acting as a site of action or resistance in its playful representation of the object and the comfort and humour found in this 'bad' acting.



Figure 9, Myself in 'rock mode' in my studio, 2021.

An artist who has an action-oriented installation practice like that of Walther is Australian sculptor Bianca Hester. One of her works I find relevant is her large-scale durational work held at ACCA, Melbourne

---

14 The intention for the Rock Costume is for the wearer to don the outfit in the installation space, make their best attempt at a rock formation and to hold that stance for five to ten minutes before removing the costume and leaving the space.

15 Andy Thomson, *weakforce 4: Standard Model Bubbles in a Vacuum*, 2016, pg 117-131.



in 2010; *Please leave these windows open overnight to enable the fans to draw in cool air during the early hours of the morning*. This project saw fifty people enrolled in the performative occurrences throughout the shows six week duration, including a horse spending time in the space.<sup>16</sup> Hester's work is charged with chance encounter and constant change; she employs a progressive method that engages in intuition.<sup>17</sup> Her practice is particularly concerned with how art has the "potential for opening up a space for action," looking at context (situational and spatial) as a way to re-orient the relations between assumed inside and outside.<sup>18</sup> The performative aspect of this project outlined her engagement with object events.<sup>19</sup> As with Walther's fabric works that lie in wait to be activated by a human body, Hester's work employs a set-like quality of staging objects within an installation space that also has a role of encounter specific to the human body. These artists have given me insight into how action and encounters can play out in an exhibition context. I am interested specifically in displaying objects that hold a potentiality of action without the resolve that comes from activation through a human body. I want to gather a liveness and a state of performance in the objects themselves without employing human interaction. By doing so, I am implementing a type of 'bad joke' to create a static passivity as in *False Step*, which engages an almost-activational aspect but then hangs in perpetual failure.



Figure 10, Documentation of Bianca Hester's exhibition *Please leave these windows open overnight to enable the fans to draw in cool air during the early hours of the morning*, Melbourne, 2010. © Bianca Hester.

16 Bianca Hester, *Please leave these windows open overnight to enable the fans to draw in cool air during the early hours of the morning*, 2010, ACCA <https://acca.melbourne/exhibition/bianca-hester-please-leave-these-windows-open-overnight-to-enable-the-fans-to-draw-in-cool-air-during-the-early-hours-of-the-morning/>.

17 Charlotte Day and Bianca Hester, *Five Points of View*, 2010, catalogue essay.

18 Bianca Hester, *Enabling Restraints*, 2008. Referring to what is perceived as inside and outside the frame of art. She also examines the dispersal of art contexts into everyday life resulting from the Minimalist and the Avant-garde movements. In the engagement with sculpture there now lies a performativity positioned by the contingencies of relations between objects, space, time and encounter.

19 The term 'event' I am using in this text to refer to occurrences that have taken place that signify an importance of the things at hand that may affect how they are valued. I am not indicating a Derridean reading of an event.



## IMMERSIVE INSTALLATION



Figure 11, *Ball Park*, The Audio Foundation, 2020, installation view. © The Audio Foundation.



In October 2020, I had an exhibition, *Ball Park*, at the Audio Foundation (which had been postponed from April) and I also performed in Aotearoa/ Australian artist Alicia Frankovich's work *AQI2020*.<sup>20</sup> Participating in this event and my own exhibition made me consider the spaces our bodies move in and the environmental effect of immersive art. I wanted to create a manoeuvring space where viewers would attune to motion and action.<sup>21</sup> I included an instructional banner with images that indicated the desired actions and occurrences during interaction with the work. The vinyl text installed on the floor contained lists of onomatopoeia words that took on a diagrammatic style and interacted with the temporal lines and shadows created by the objects in the space. The vinyl words have a way of subverting the role of lists as they could be seen closer to shapes on the floor as opposed to words with meaning and intention.<sup>22</sup>

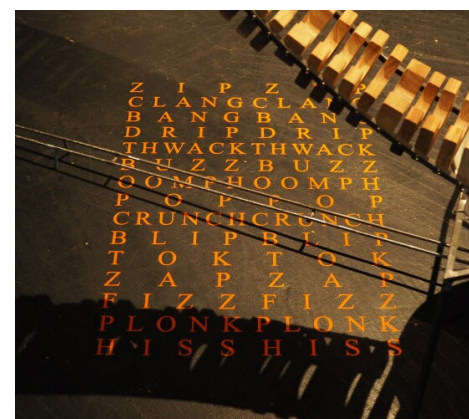


Figure 12, *Ball Park*, The Audio Foundation, 2020, installation view of vinyl lists. © The Audio Foundation.

20 *AQI2020* was a retelling of the bush fires in Australia that occurred at the beginning of 2020 through choreographed movement. Amongst a group of fifteen performers who had dance backgrounds, I was the only visual artist. It was revealing to me as an event that demonstrated the body as object and the power and force behind body-to-body interaction. As a performer, I attended four rehearsals where we were shown media images from the period of the fires and interpreted these images into a sequence of movements and actions.

21 *Ball Park* was participatory as I had made that decision prior to this project. The audience was able to choose a ceramic marble from an orange Perspex cube hanging from the ceiling, and drop it down a cascading ramp made of Rimu offcuts that I'd routed semicircles into to make a trough.

22 See British artist David Shrigley's *Monument*, 2016, who puts a shopping list onto a large-scale memorial slab of granite. Incomparable to my vinyl words on the floor, they still have a similarity in their subversive tactics.





Figure 13, Alicia Frankovich, *WE ARE HOUSED (in and around this stuff)*, 2005, installation view. © Alicia Frankovich.

Frankovich's earlier explorations into installation were more material and object-oriented. In 2005, she had an exhibition at The Physics Room, *WE ARE HOUSED (in and around all this stuff)*, which filled the exhibition room with found and made objects. This included banners and vacuum seal bags on the walls, chairs, and posters suspended and stuck to the ceiling, and a broken spring bed on the floor.<sup>23</sup> Frankovich performed with these objects, responding to them with her body and movements as she traversed the room. I find this work of Frankovich's important in understanding my project as 'not quite immersive' but an ambling type of installation. My installation practice requires being manoeuvred through space as I make multiple objects with attention to detail and a focus on the relationship to the surrounding environment. A movement of ambling is insinuated as a way to experience my installations and objects from all angles.

An example of immersive installation relevant to my intent is Aotearoa artist Mark Schroder's *Bureau of Happiness* (2021). Schroder often takes over an entire gallery space, using scale and incredible detail in his making strategies. His work intervenes in the value production of failure and success. He utilises humour through language and sculptural jokes in a similar way to how I think about objects. Such as the cigarette butts, real and ceramic, introduced into the pot plants that sit throughout *Bureau of Happiness*. There are also various postcards, brochures, and pamphlet ephemera promoting failure. One of these reads "don't wait for failure...create it." There is a rejection of normal standards of business etiquette and office environments. The blatant humour Schroder uses in the installation explores the ridiculousness of how businesses operate. In my own practice, I also intend for failure to be a tool that reveals structures of systems that are empty of compassion. Using the site of the playground my intention is not to critique the play area itself but utilise the imaginative qualities of that space and locate the project in



Figure 14, Mark Schroder, *Bureau of Happiness*, Gus Fisher Gallery, 2021, installation detail. © Mark Schroder.

---

<sup>23</sup> Alicia Frankovich, *WE ARE HOUSED (in and around this stuff)*, The Physics Room, 2005 <http://www.physicsroom.org.nz/exhibitions/we-are-housed-in-and-around-all-of-this-stuff>.



a public, social system. The position of my project is in a context of installation that, through the narrative of failure, engages in challenging the competitive nature of play and games. Although my work does not saturate the viewer, Frankovich and Schroder have helped me think about strategies and devices that engage in scale and detail. Therefore in my own practice I can create relational reactions that embraces a different reflection of social expectations.





Figure 15, Mark Schroder, *Bureau of Happiness*, Gus Fisher Gallery, 2021, installation detail. © Mark Schroder.



# ***METHODOLOGIES: TUNNELLING, PIPING, SLIDING***



Figure 16, Richard Linklater, *Slacker*, 1991, film still. © fair use.



## THRESHOLDS, WINDOW FRAMES & PANES

At the beginning of this project, I had been thinking of the film *Slacker* and imagining what it could be like to frame a 'slacker methodology'. Directed by Richard Linklater in 1990, this well-crafted film is made in long shots, panning from person to person through the streets, bars, and flats of Austin, Texas. The connections of reoccurring characters are pronounced in the film through filmic methods that create feelings of chance and realness. There seems to be an effortless flow of synchronicity, but behind the scenes, a lot of labour. This feeling could be compared to *The Way Things Go*, a film of chaotic but synchronistic events by German artist duo Fischli and Weiss. Jeremy Millar writes of *The Way Things Go* that it is film of "everyday objects crashing, falling, tripping, rolling... in the seemingly never-ending sequence of controlled catastrophe."<sup>24</sup> *Slacker* and *The Way Things Go* provide relevant insight into how I experience objects and materials as they come in and out of focus in my practice in a synchronistic flow similar to the films.<sup>25</sup> Film reviewer Derick Malcolm states that *Slacker* looks as if it is not a film at all, but something that just happened to have happened.<sup>26</sup> Often the labour in my practice is not visible in what I produce but exists only as something that has occurred. The process of taking an idea to fruition all relies on material availability and timing. It is an intuitive and improvisational decision making method based on what is at hand or what has come directly before, which means my practice is eclectic and expansive. The moments where things don't work out as planned become as important as when things do work out.

---

24 Jeremy Millar, *Fischli and Weiss: The Way Things Go*, 2007, pg 1.

25 For example, when I made *Gift Box* I first obtained a sliding box from the 3D lab that was going in the bin. It was used in the lab for storage but had become redundant. I see this encounter sparking the making of more sliding boxes comparable to encounters of the characters in the film *Slacker*.

26 Derek Malcolm, *Slacker*, The Guardian, 1992, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/1992/dec/03/1>. Accessed 12th May, 2021.





Figure 17, *Baskets*, video still, 2020.

*Baskets* is a video documentation of myself shooting some baskets at a hoop in Morningside, Tamaki Makaurau. It began with only one ball, the camera angled to see only the hoop and backboard. After a minute or so, two young boys joined in, and the video changes to three balls attempting to get in the hoop. All of us were not very good, which was both a humorous and somewhat futile exploration of failure in a sporting game context. *Baskets* was a documentation of a synchronistic event that made me curious about the failure found in things that didn't go as planned. Such as missing the hoop, which is an occurrence that is not usually celebrated.

*Slacker* was a springboard to move into thinking about failure. It provided a way of forming rhetoric around failure that contextualises my project in a refusal of societal norms. In one of the first scenes of the film, a group of boys in their early 20's ruminate on the writings of Dostoyevsky at a coffee shop table. Imagining being the author in the process of writing *The Gambler*, one of them says:



Who's ever written the great work about the immense effort required... in order not to create? Intensity without mastery. The obsessiveness of the utterly passive.

And could it be that in this passivity... I shall find my freedom?<sup>27</sup>

This relates to the potential of refusal against productive behaviours. There is a power in passivity and doing nothing, which relates to redundancy and is an intriguing way to think of the actions within my project. As I have come to explore failures of expectation and the potential that resides in refusing norms of success, passivity is an action that demonstrates this idea. The passivity of the objects I make have also been redundant in the way they refuse modalities of expected action. For example, *False Step*, a set of stairs that do not operate as stairs, or *Gift Box*, which are kitses that suggest a different type of aid. The lack or redundancy of expected action becomes a refusal against behavioural standards. Although I have been very productive making these objects during this project, and a lot of effort has gone into them, the works I have made explore the performativity of the passive.

---

27 Richard Linklater, *Slacker*, pg4 [https://www.scripts.com/script/slacker\\_18272](https://www.scripts.com/script/slacker_18272).



## GLITCHES, CRACKS AND THE PROCESSUAL ADVANTAGES OF AN AMATEURISH ART PRACTICE

As methodologies tend to do in visual arts practice-led projects, mine has morphed and changed throughout the project. Amateurism as a methodology has dominated as a way of thinking through making. It has aided the inquiry into queerness in relation to systems of value and labour. The identified slacker methodology I think of as being the grounding rhetoric that gives context to my project. My inner slacker related to a more temporal, emotionally aware pace where I could make artwork that neither subtracted nor added material but rather observed, arranged, and pointed out things from my everyday experience. As I moved back into the studio and workshop spaces, both privileged and overwhelmed, I strived to keep up this feeling of giving it a go and working with observations of things around me.

For me, amateurism reflects a goal for not being taken seriously. This brings in American academic Jack Halberstam's concept of how this approach allows for frivolity and irrelevance. He reflects that the "desire to be taken seriously is precisely what compels people to follow the tried and true paths of knowledge production."<sup>28</sup> Some amateurs out there absolutely want to be taken seriously. The benefits of amateurism relating to my art practice are more about freedom of expectation found in the rejection of considered success similar to the artists Fischli & Weiss, who "strive(d) for mediocrity."<sup>29</sup> Without aiming high for success, a grounded expectation of giving it a go allows for a denomination of failure and

---

28 Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 2011, pg 6.

29 In *Flowers & Question* 2006, Claire Bishop writes about Fischli and Weiss' work *Quiet Afternoon*, 1984-5 saying that "they don't strive to be the first or best or most spectacular. They even seem to harness mediocrity." (p.97) She suggests the position that these artists strive for as being a space which rejects mainstream ideas of success in the artworld. Instead, they tread in the areas of mediocrity in order to have the freedom to be playful and not overthink their sculptural practice.



success to be achieved simultaneously. I am embracing my own version of amateurism rather than the traditional perspective of it. Through this methodology, I can discard the dualistic nature of success and failure and view them as structures of meaning in a system with an agenda of competitive expectation.

Enjoyment is key to my practice. That is, finding ways that celebrate pleasure in making rather than fulfilling capitalist expectations of production.<sup>30</sup> French artist Dominique Gonzalez Foerster writes that “I always look for experimental processes. I like the fact that at the beginning I don’t know how to do things and then, slowly, I start learning.”<sup>31</sup> By following an amateurish methodology, I can embrace the enjoyment that comes from this project’s processual and provisional learning. While not disregarding my own academic position as privileged and professional, I am thinking of amateurism as a way to imply a different kind of knowledge. It can aggravate the boundaries between expert and amateur, work and hobby, leisure and productivity. I’m interested in blurring these dualities in an ad hoc way. In practice, this could be going to the nearest fishing store and purchasing steel wire and colourful sailor’s rope to use within an installation. It also exists in the repetitious pattern that I find myself making with. Sculptural iterations have an amateurish and game-like quality of striving for something. I am celebrating the freedom of mediocrity and moments of awkwardness explored through repetition. Not having a goal of perfection or assumption of professionalism is a key component that gives rise to chance encounters with modes of making that I may have never considered. The late American artist John Baldessari once said: “Art comes out of failure. You have to try things out. You can’t

---

30 See the book of collected opinions on failure, edited by Lisa Le Feuvre. In particular how failure can challenge and “undermine the perceived stability of mainstream capitalist ideology’s preferred aspiration to achieve, succeed, or win.” 2011, pg 2.

31 Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Tate Artists, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/dominique-gonzalez-foerster-10354>.



sit around, terrified of being incorrect.”<sup>32</sup> This statement supports the relevance of my amateur methodology in the potential of working with experimentation. There is also a sense of humility in avoiding professionalism and success. Missing the ‘point’ has become the point of this practice and, in a way, energises the methods that I employ. Slacker and amateur methodologies provide me with ways of resisting conventional expectations in society. I see an agency of resistance arising in these methodologies and the methods I use in my practice. By positioning value on failure and its potential, I resist persistent notions of how one should aspire to be.

---

32 John Baldessari in Sarah Thornton’s *Seven Days in the Art World*, 2008, pg 52.



## DIAGRAMMATIC SCULPTURE



Figure 18, Paul Cullen, *Desert Diagrams*, 2016, Los Angeles. © Paul Cullen Archive.

A diagrammatic method of making has risen from an amateur methodology. There is a sense of play and testing when diagrammatic qualities are employed in an artwork. With this comes a detachment from outcomes, freedom of motion and ambiguity. The late Aotearoa New Zealand artist Paul Cullen engaged in an extended exploration of the diagrammatic and structures that are informed by them. His work, *Desert Diagrams*, 2016, is an example of how he used provisional methods in his making. There are often found objects, off-cuts, pencil lines, or tell-tale signs of past projects and the continuously changing life of the material. His assemblage-come-installation practice has been well described as “intelligently deployed pieces in a board-game whose rules we are not yet familiar with.”<sup>33</sup> I resonate with the translation of diagrams

---

33 Allan Smith, *An Art of Possibilities*, 1991.



to drawing form to sculptural form. The contingencies of this transition expands the artwork's social and spatial contexts to become integrated into the reading of the work. Regarding my practice, I am pushing the temporality of the exhibition context of my work through a drawing and diagrammatic aesthetic. The 'playground' of my installations are relational to the social and spatial environments that house it.

When I think about amateurism and diagrammatic methods, I find myself in an exciting space of ambiguity. I can subvert the meanings of things like failure and success and explore how materials gain value, focussing on supplying all the materials I use with equal value. With this thinking, the supportive role of a rope or shelf could reflect on how systems of support operate in relationships they have to surrounding objects, bodies, or other systems. The friendship of material and objects within an installation can display an equivalence that prioritises a caring system. Making with these concepts in mind resists the material value that might usually be placed on objects.

I made two ceramic pools, *Pool Side*, that I made thinking about spaces that I value and have aspects of care. In the context of games and play, I have been examining areas that allow games to occur. Pools and playgrounds are amongst these spaces that reference leisure, time out and care. The diagrammatical game aesthetic has persisted in this project, and into the furniture pieces I made. *Stack Shelf* is a work that resists common attributes of a well-designed, functional piece of furniture. Harking in and out of different decades of design sensibilities using thick square legs and clear Perspex, *Stack Shelf* delineates a playful failure. The ceramic snakes and ladders that weave through it reference the boardgame while retaining a rejection of function in both game and furniture fields. My sculptural objects can act as propositions for a game, map, or instruction for a future system. In similar ways that amateurism resists the academic professionalism of 'expert,' a diagrammatic method resists placement in a single articulation. It holds my work in a state of fluidity between definitions of drawing, sculpture, diagram, and failure.

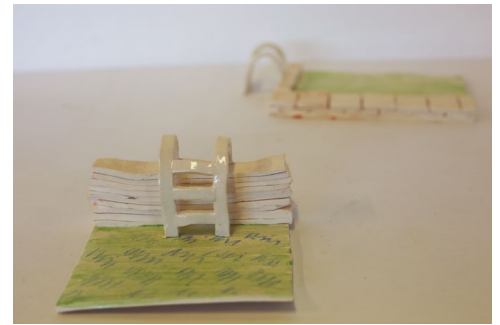


Figure 19, *Pool Side(s)*, 2020.



Figure 20, *Stack Shelf*, May 2021, close up view.





Figure 21, prototype of *Stack Shelf*, March, 2021.



Figure 22, *Stack Shelf* frame, April 2021.



# ***FAILURE, QUEERNESS & REPETITION: PARKS, SCHOOLS, MALLS***



Figure 23, pinkysill remnants, 2020.



## POTENTIAL OF FAILURE



Figure 24, one part of the straight block mould.



Figure 25, one part of the curved block mould.

After my exhibition *Ballpark*, I started making giant duplo blocks out of plaster at a similar scale to a standard brick (but not quite).<sup>34</sup> The casting process was something that I had not engaged with to this extent before. The objects were big, and making a two-part mould with a plaster shell, and pinkysil interior was more complicated than I thought. I went through two months of trial-and-error operations with pouring the pinkysil. Because of this, I now have a collection of pink semi-abstract offcuts of the versions that leaked, had holes, or ‘failed’ to perform the function I needed; therefore becoming productively redundant.<sup>35</sup> The mould that I developed began casting without fault and then steadily leaked and morphed to create something slightly different with each iteration. The blocks themselves were heavy, and I strained to get each one out of their mould. *Wall Piece* (what I titled the work) carried some of the labour involved through the bubbles, gaps, and leakages that occurred in the process.

---

34 As a kid, my brother and I shared brick-like Lego blocks that stacked. They had a lid on the top and came in the classic Lego colours of yellow, red, blue and green. It was only after visiting home again that I made the connection between the plaster blocks and the colourful Lego containers of my childhood.

35 These pieces of pinkysil still have marks and residue of plaster. I have saved all the pieces and cut them along the edges into flat panels. In their abject state of failure I see them operating in a way that is still functional. They ooze and leak with their bulbous bits and protruding antennae. I see them being activated as a puddle on the ground or on a table for scientific inspection. They definitely ‘do’ something in the space of my studio. They keep it ruptured and energized. Promoting action and more making to cover them up with other matter.



The leakages led to thinking about slippage and leakage from a system and how that can shift structures of value.<sup>36</sup> There is a visually processual quality to the blocks that hold resistance to being a finished and determined shape. The term ‘process’ is often used to describe German-born American artist Eva Hesse’s<sup>37</sup> work, particularly her small experimental *Test Piece(s)* made with mixed media such as latex, fabric, papier mache, wood, or metal. Her objects became a “landscape of things,” rejecting the finished characteristics of Minimalism.<sup>38</sup> There is poetic potential in *Wall Piece* together, as the iterative blocks stack in a pattern that has a gap between each unit. The title, *Wall Piece* came from how it fails to be a wall in the traditional sense of a wall due to the gaps. The work nods to Minimalism in its stacking and repetition. Still, it breaks with the modernist trajectories through the visual treatment of the leakages and leftover present in the final objects.<sup>39</sup>

The object status of the blocks disregards their operational characteristics. In this state of redundant potential, there is a loosening of meaning. This instigates an exploration into the material and its relationship to the environment. Rather than a singular pre-determined object, I am more interested in how they are incomplete or movable sculptures that hold power and curiosity through their detail and the suggestion of action.



Figure 26, Eva Hesse, *Test Piece(s)*, displayed in the exhibition Studiowork at Camden Art Centre, 2010.

---

36 In Derridean terms a slippage is a way to subvert dominant cultural systems. He uses language and the deconstruction of it to negotiate a deconstruction of the cultural system which house these determinedly stoic and outdated modes. Collins and Mayblin, *Derrida for Beginners*, 1996.

37 Eva Hesse (1936–1970).

38 Briony Fer, *The Scatter: Sculpture as Leftover* in Helen Molesworth, *Part Object Part Sculpture*, 2006, pg 225.

39 Carl Andre’s work with bricks, *Equivalent*, 1966 is a direct example of how commonplace material was used in minimalism to loosen the meaning from the material.



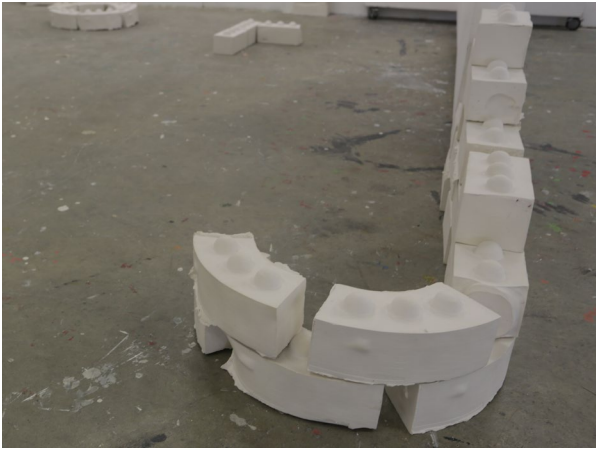


Figure 27, *Wall Piece*, Feb 2021.



Figure 28, iteration of *Wall Piece*, installation view from Talk Day, Feb 2021.



Figure 29, iteration of *Wall Piece*, installation view from Talk Day, Feb 2021.



I have experienced my own curiosity that comes with failed objects that lack completion. Obsolete things that have been made redundant or have a history of trying, and functioning is what I find the most interesting. When something is a clean object (pristine, minimal, zero leakage), I find it holds less intrigue as nothing confounds me. Through courting failure, there is much to be achieved, to gain, and to learn from. Alicia Frankovich has courted failure through her mis-performances that, in staging a failure through lack of agency or part object, have held a frustration and desire for wholeness.<sup>40</sup> Aotearoa artist and writer Chris Braddock has written on Frankovich's work *Flying Fox*. During this performance work she stuck one leg out of a second story window while the audience on the street below viewed the static appendage. The rest of her unseen body, Braddock describes as operating as "redundancy charged with potential."<sup>41</sup> Redundancy, like failure, has the power to carry potential. When observing a crack, leak, or obsolete thing which holds history, I get excited. In this practice-led project, I have explored objects that insinuate action and process. The potentiality of there being action involved is parallel to the frustration and desire resulting from lack or leakage. This is how I see the potential of failure operating in this project. With *Wall Piece*, the mould spillages and seams that came out of it have become the most valued. I have been putting considerable labour into the celebration of these curious failures and excesses.

---

40 Chris Braddock writes in *Alicia Frankovich and The Force of Failure*, 2010, about the performance works where Frankovich has surrendered the agency of her body to an outside party.

41 Chris Braddock, *Alicia Frankovich and the Force of Failure*, 2010, Column 5, pg12 <http://www.christopherbraddock.com/writing/alicia-frankovich-and-the-force-of-failure-column-5-2010/> accessed 5/04/2021.



Figure 30, Alicia Frankovich, *Flying Fox*, 2008, documentation of performance. © Alicia Frankovich.



This project has considered objects and structures that support play, things we stack, build with or hold up. These objects retain a sense of action through suggestion, thus creating tension in the potential action that might occur. Some of the objects I have made appear unwhole in their lack of bodily interaction through latent action. For me, it is the systems and structures in place that position failure in a detrimental, negative way within society. The expectation of action within my sculptural practice is suggested but never transpires. There is a failure insinuated because of this and a perpetual suggestion of fluctuating possibilities.<sup>42</sup> I do not want to resolve failure but celebrate it through sculptural exploration. I am revealing the boundaries of societal expectations and pointing out the inadequacy of systems of heteronormativity and language.

The complex ramifications of support structures and systems, when exposed, undo simple binary oppositions and work on the inherent relational level between forces.<sup>43</sup>

This quote from British artist Celine Condorelli demonstrates how I have been addressing failure and the binary nature in which it is perceived. Through Condorelli's notion of support structures, I can expose the oddities of expectations of success and the redundant detriments of failure. Thus, I explore the rewards found in failure and imperfection.

---

42 Briony Fer writes about Orozco's economy of leftovers. "Leftovers come to stand not for what has been but what will be...Focusing attention on leftovers puts in question the value of what we choose to keep" pg 228. I relate this to my own process of locating material linked to Slacker ideas of chance encounters. It is an intuitive embrace of going for a relational pull towards whatever makes one excited. The fluctuating possibilities that left overs and part objects suggest insight an awareness of the conditioning around expectation.

43 Celine Condorelli, *Support Structures*, 2009, pg 12.



## QUEER OBJECTS, QUEER SPACES & REPETITION

As a queer pakeha woman in Aotearoa, I find power and belonging in my identity as well as feeling out of place. There is a duality in identifying as queer that demands an alteration or smoothing over of the self to fit spaces designated for heterosexual bodies. I want to reclaim a sense of belonging in an environment predominantly made for and by the white heterosexual male (institutions, governments, art world). By forming a dissonant practice that converses with tensions between materials and the relationships of bodies, objects, and the space that holds them – I aim to queer space and interrogate how spaces are produced.

Feminist writer and scholar Sara Ahmed argues that heterosexual bodies extend into space as the normative space takes form by taking on their form. Whereas the homosexual body is seen as oblique or slanting, not fitting into a heterosexual norm. Ahmed writes, “spaces and bodies become straight as an effect of repetition. That is, the repetition of action...”<sup>44</sup> In this way, the forces of compulsory heterosexuality, through this ‘repetition of action’ create spaces formed for heterosexual bodies. The act of ‘queering’ space instigates an attempt at a repetition of queer action and objects, allowing room for queer bodies to emerge. For me, this looks like making a costume to become a rock or a wall of modular blocks that aid connection rather than separation. Feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz argues that what is queer is that which performs its own parody.<sup>45</sup> Using methods that intentionally refuse a standard representation of the shapes or scale of commonly used objects (furniture, architecture, toys, games), I am ‘parodying’ or representing queer bodies by exceeding the limitations of heteronormative products. My practice pushes and points out the boundaries and structures that confine or exclude queer bodies of people. I designed and made a set of

---

44 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 2006, pg 91.

45 Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion*, 1995, pg 17.



specifically scaled tables that had tops that were the exact dimensions of an A4 piece of paper. This is an example of a queering method. They are not a usual sized table (the tables I made are tall or short, skinny, and wobbly), and they are designed to hold up a stack of print paper of dimensions that are internationally used. The A4 paper size dimensions I used as a metaphorical representation of one form of binary norms that are a part of a structure that conditions the order of correspondence.

American writer Jack Halberstam considers the connection and relationship of queerness and failure in his book *The Queer Art of Failure*, 2011. He examines the strategies of forgetting, losing, and failing as being intrinsic to the history of queer experience.<sup>46</sup> In my project, this has helped me to formulate a methodology of amateurism as it allows for simultaneous research into failure and queerness. Halberstam's book was something of an instigator into this research project and aided connecting the production of culture with value production.<sup>47</sup> I have been 'thinking through making' about these histories of queer experience. Architectural space, as well as public space, have ways of creating visual hierarchies. I am interested in the peripheral areas and objects that are overlooked. The ceramic 'limpets' that I made for the Visual Arts Postgraduate Talk Day installation I placed on the peripheries of the studio exhibition space.<sup>48</sup> The 'limpets' are amateur in their making in how they both use and imitate body marks and gestures rather than the clean lines of the architectural space. By placing value on the edges of the space, I wanted to test this language of queerness relating to difference, failure, and the peripheral.



Figure 31, *limpets*, 2021, installation details.

46 Jack Halberstam, "Homosexuality and Fascism: The Killer in me is the Killer in You" in *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

47 Throughout his book, Halberstam dissects animated movies and other films to pick out the patterns of queerness in characteristics of the films. The modes of operation in these documents of popular culture reflect how modes of value have coerced societal expectations of individuals.

48 Talk Day was a critical forum event held at AUT for the MVA/PhD postgrad cohort to receive feedback on work/s presented in studio. There were guests from in and outside of the university who were part of groups of three to four students, and a 'host' from the academic staff.





Figure 32, *A4 table #1 feat limpet*, Jan 2021.



Figure 33, *A4 table #2*, Jan 2021.



Another strategy I have been using to explore queerness and failure is repetition. The connection between the amateur and diagrammatic way I make is filled with effort and repetition. Ahmed describes heterosexual space as being made through the “repetition of action.”<sup>49</sup> For the blocks I made for *Wall Piece(s)* and *Gift Box*, I have used repetition as a mode of operating in a zone of middle ground or the commonplace. The limpets were also made in multiple, testing different shapes and weights. I see this method as queering the objects through various iterations of the same body. My intention is that the repetitions of amateur actions create queer bodies in these objects. The blocks for *Wall Piece(s)* I have been casting in multiples have slipped into realms of queerness through difference and mistake. The decision I made to have a curved mould and a straight mould also relates to Ahmed’s writing on the queer oblique body. Therefore, the repetition of the curved blocks reiterates the queer body (alongside the straight body), performing and claiming a ‘queered’ space.

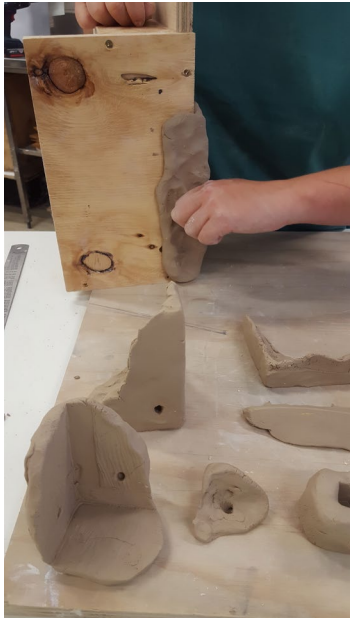


Figure 34, making the *limpets* in the Wet Lab at AUT, Jan 2021.

---

49 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 2006, pg 91.





Figure 35, Talk Day installation, *Untitled*, Feb 2021.



## ***MORE METHODS AND PROCESS: DIGGING, STACKING, PILING, PUSHING***



Figure 36, Skip on Galatos St, April 2021.



## PLAYING WITH PROVISIONALITY

Using the diagrammatic as a connective method, I have been positioning this research practice in the provisional context. With this strategy, I can move freely to demonstrate a playful push against the expectations of success and value production. Prototypes and diagrams can be very polished. By using a methodological lens of amateurism, I am deliberately contextualising my work in the fast-paced and provisional. This allows my diagrammatic making to have roughness or precision depending on my own industry of making. The materials I use are often chosen to accommodate this tactic. It might depend on availability, what is literally free at the time or the feeling I have on that day toward the material. Objects and materials often inspire ideas and the direction of decisions. The scope of materials might include bicycle inner tubes, offcuts in a skip, garage sale bargains, Rubik's cubes, marbles, dice, rocks, or gifted obsolete stationary. The provisional methods that I utilise have required a strong level of trust in my own intuition. This means even if it might be my first time engaging with a particular process, it is a material trust that guides the making. I use imaginative methods and have fun with what and how I make. These explorative characteristics of the project have led me to gain many insights into my own terrain of thinking.

When I collect found or bargain objects and materials, I allow myself time to ruminate to consider their moment of announcement. I want the life of things to be continuous and changing. I enjoy thinking about how objects relate to an environment and the effects that it has on an object. In April 2021, I collected a piece of carpet from a skip just off Karangahape Rd in Central Tamaki Makaurau that will become the coverings for *Carpet Slide*.<sup>50</sup> The improvisational tactic carries through in the way I treat and display materials.

---

<sup>50</sup> *Carpet Slide* is a sculpture that I am in the process of making. It is a child size, hand-made slide which I am covering in found carpet.



Consequently, I've become more intrigued by structures, materials, and objects that rely on other things such as shelves, rope, handles, walls, or floors.<sup>51</sup> I want to animate these things in a way that lets them have as much visibility as the objects 'on display'. Condorelli talks about thinking through support as a call to "open up and reconsider systems of production and their unspoken rules and ideologies."<sup>52</sup> She embraces the obligation to address the privileges of support concerning who and what is being supported. How might I address privilege in supportive structures and translate that into an equivalence within a sculptural practice? By making installations with multiple iterations of objects and many materials involved, I am highlighting how exhibition spaces could parallel unspoken rules and ideologies that privilege hierarchical modes of display.



Figure 37, Celine Condorelli, *Tools for Imagination (1:1)*, Vienna, 2019. © Celine Condorelli

---

51 The final exhibition of *Playground of Failure* will include a floor installation of rubber tiles that are typically found in playgrounds.

52 Celine Condorelli, *Support Structures*, 2009, pg 12.



## EFFORT, SUPPORT AND HUMOUR



Figure 38 & 39, Lucy Meyle, *Does a Flower Rehearse for Spring?*, ST PAUL St Gallery, 2018. © Lucy Meyle.

Lucy Meyle is an artist from Aotearoa who often embeds a sense of support in her work. Her ramps for snails and ducks and the peanut table she made for her PhD project, *Does a Flower Rehearse for Spring?*, have a reverent sense of relation. The proximity between site, object, or animal in her work translates a relationality and consideration of support systems for non-human forms.<sup>53</sup> The table is supporting each peanut in a snug embrace through individual peanut-shaped inlays in the table. In Meyle's artwork, attention is centred on the support of non-human (ducks, snails, peanuts). There is a strong sense of drawing and assured playfulness attached to her work that sits well, I think, alongside my diagrammatic sculpture and methodology of amateurism. Wiggle room, a term coined by Ahmed and explored by Meyle's during her PhD project, is a language tool that she uses to push against certain expectations or structures. She writes:

---

53 Abby Cunneane, *Whose Clothes are Falling in a Pigeon Rain*, 2020.



Wiggling is a movement against... calling attention to or pushing apart, showing a bit of extra space where there wasn't before... If you have enough space, there is probably less of a compulsion to agitate in order to be more comfortable. A wiggle movement is an agitation then, by definition done within the confines of some kind of structure.<sup>54</sup>

I see a connection to Meyle's sculptural relationality in the reliance that the objects in my project have for each other. I have been thinking about structures and objects designed for use by people, and what happens when these objects are recreated or skewed to become inoperable.<sup>55</sup> Objects that people walk or sit on, side-step, or rely on without being aware of this reliance. Would there be a level of precarity and confusion that could ensue, and how might that provoke an effect of reimagining in the viewer? By making objects that have a punch line or reference games, or social systems, I aim to playfully debunk the logic of systems and 'wiggle' against the boundaries of the norm. Wiggle room and the film *Slacker* both display an agency of resistance which implies an aggravation of the limitations that house the norms of expectation. *Slacker*, in its disestablishment of the logic of a film narrative and 'wiggle room' as terminology used to push against boundaries. I am interpreting 'wiggle room' in this project to create space and fluidity in the definitions of failure and success.

British artist David Shrigley has a drawing and sculptural practice where ironic punchlines consider absurdity and moral judgement of everyday events. There is amateurism in Shrigley's style of cartoon drawings and animations that allow their representation to have a playful sincerity in contrast to the stark comedy of his work. An article on Shrigley's work by British writer Michael Bracewell discusses how humour reveals the

---

54 Lucy Meyle, *Does a Flower Rehearse for Spring?*, 2018, pg 25.

55 See Amanda Rowell's writing on Mikala Dwyer who similarly puts emphasis on the 'skewing' of how things operate. Dwyer focuses on the "upside-downness, sagging, unsteadiness or imperfection" of objects in her practice.



profound absurdity of social conditioning that lies in humanity.<sup>56</sup> In this way, Shrigley's humour provides a form of resistance in its striving for exposure of the production of moral code and value within society.

Someone else who explores resistance and failure is Aotearoa artist, lawyer, and writer Layne Waerea whose practice emphasises questioning legalities over property, trespassing, and public space. Her extensive practice of actions or interventions "operate to question and critique social and legal norms that govern and give license to preferred social behaviours in the public realm."<sup>57</sup> Examples of these are *Chasing Fog*, *Free Promises*, *Clouds for Sale*, *Free Jokes*, *Free Excuses*, and *Berm*. These actions exemplify how failure and humour can work in tandem to undermine dominant ideas of achievement or progress. In my practice, I find humour operating in a 'punch line' way that also attempts to uncover or ruminate on mainstream value production. The 'bad jokes' within *Playground of Failure* humorously point out language and structures of competitive ideals that are often not questioned.



Figure 40, Layne Waerea, *Free Excuses*, ST PAUL St Gallery, 2014. © Layne Waerea

---

56 Michael Bracewell, *Jesus Doesn't Want Me For a Sunbeam*, 1995 in *The Artist's Joke*, Documents of Contemporary Art, MIT Press, 2007.

57 Layne Waerea, *Free social injunctions: Art interventions as agency in the production of socio-legal subjectivities not yet imagined or realised*, 2016, pg 2.



## ***CONCLUSION: SCRAPING, THIRSTING, EXHAUSTING***

*Playground of failure, Bad Jokes and Other Forms of Resistance* has been an experimental ambling in the realm of installation. Modalities of failure and success have been explored through found, assembled, and handmade objects. I have been experiencing failure as my own success or feeling them both simultaneously. The intricacies of dualities like failure and success, good and bad, are all constructed to assume an objective experience of these terms. The superficial appearance of constructs such as failure and success often have hidden, deep-rooted structures propping them up.<sup>58</sup> Through this project, I have been ‘wiggling’ against the boundaries of these dualistic definitions to modify the experience through installation. French anthropologist Levi Strauss describes how a structure reflects the characteristics of a system. When a change is undergone in a structure, there are series of transformative elements resulting in the system that houses that structure.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, subverting the ‘structure’ of failure and success, I am also subverting the system it is held within. Through this process, I am exploring the potential of failure as an agency of resistance. In this modality, I feel I can assume a refusal of the heteronormative production of value.

With a provisional way of working alongside a methodology of amateurism, I have been figuring out ways to balance the weights of the contexts and materials I use. With humour, queering, and the diagrammatic strategies as methods I have further explored forms of resistance against normal modes of value. I enjoy the crossover

---

58 In *Support Structures*, 2009, Celine Condorelli explores the appearance of structures and their underlying principles. She describes a support structure as an addition, which when attached to an existing dynamic or system, redistributes the forces that also go with them. These forces can be as deep as abstract levels, ordering and conditioning how we language structures.

59 Celine Condorelli, *Support Structures*, 2009, pg 29.



between drawing (diagrammatic), building, and prototype/models. With amateurism giving way to a free-flowing processual way of making, I have been able to work with contingencies and chance. From found materials to mistakes made during construction, all of the events and decisions made during this project were responsive in a playful way. Through iterations in casting plaster, ceramics, or wooden boxes, I have celebrated queerness through futile acts of production. Placing value on the edges, undersides, and overlooked spaces adds to the queering of space and parts of the slacker methodology, displaying the value of the stagnant and passive. The joys and benefits within this scope of pleasure help to retain a balance within productivity norms in society.

The playground site has given my project its playful tonality and the freedom that I have felt in my object-based practice. Games and leisure have been contexts that my project's contextual terrain is situated in alongside the playground. Like Paul Cullen, I have been creating a new language or set of rules for this playground that translates my practice. Contemplating architectural structures such as stairs, walls, or doors, I intend to create equivalence of relations. Along with the materials and objects that I view with equal value and visibility, I apply the same structure to the space that supports my work. It is an encapsulating environment that leaks and spills into the lived context of everyday life. This is how I see my work operating in its form of almost-immersive installation, in the way that structural hierarchies of object, space, and material have morphed into a relational implication of the connections and equivalence between things.

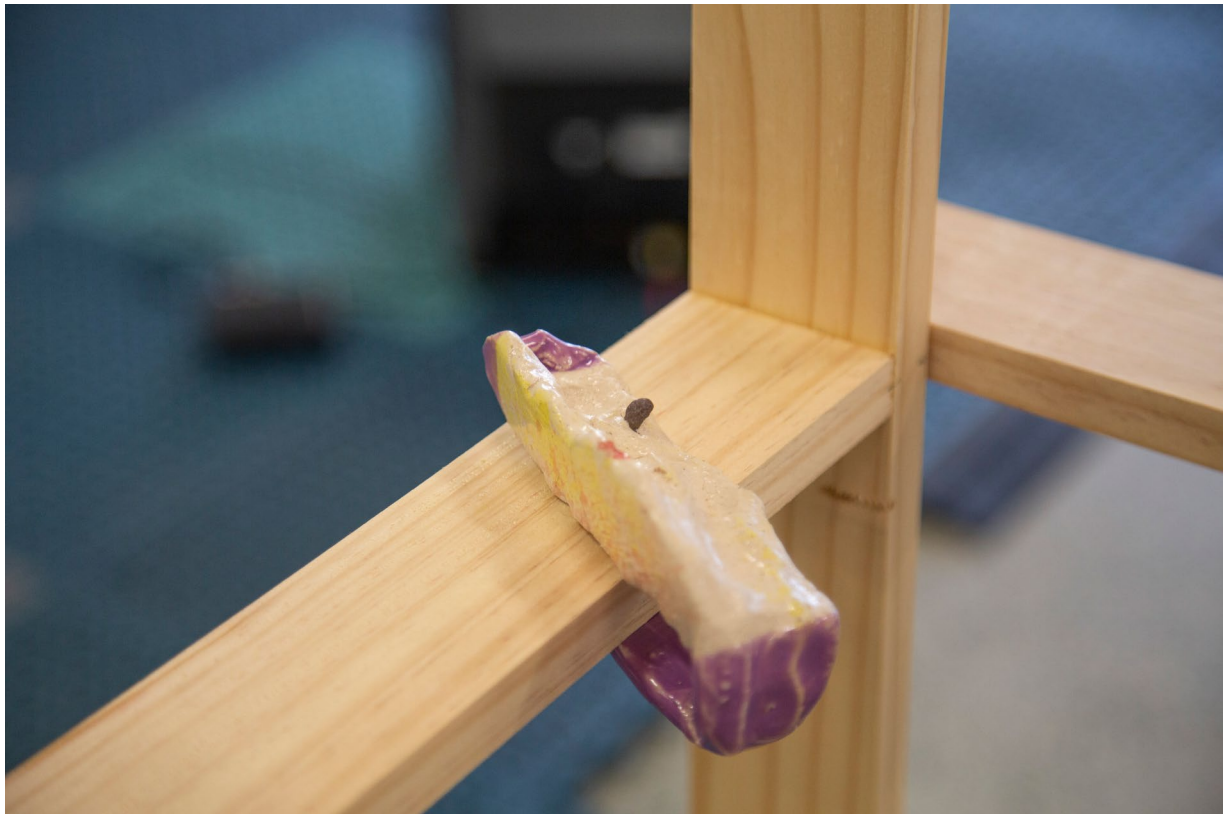
The failure that I care about is the kind of frustration and near-misses that can create tension and curiosity in sculptural practice. The seemingly interactive/yet not interactive is an observation that this project has explored. I have been making with a diagrammatic style and projecting a propositional tactic that glitches and stutters while manoeuvring through the (exhibition) space. Celebrating this glitch is very important to me as a sculptor working in the context of failure and play. Having fun with making, valuing the time spent trying, being patient, getting it wrong, trying again, making a mess is all part of the process that has wound its way through my practice.



## ***DOCUMENTATION OF FINAL SHOW***















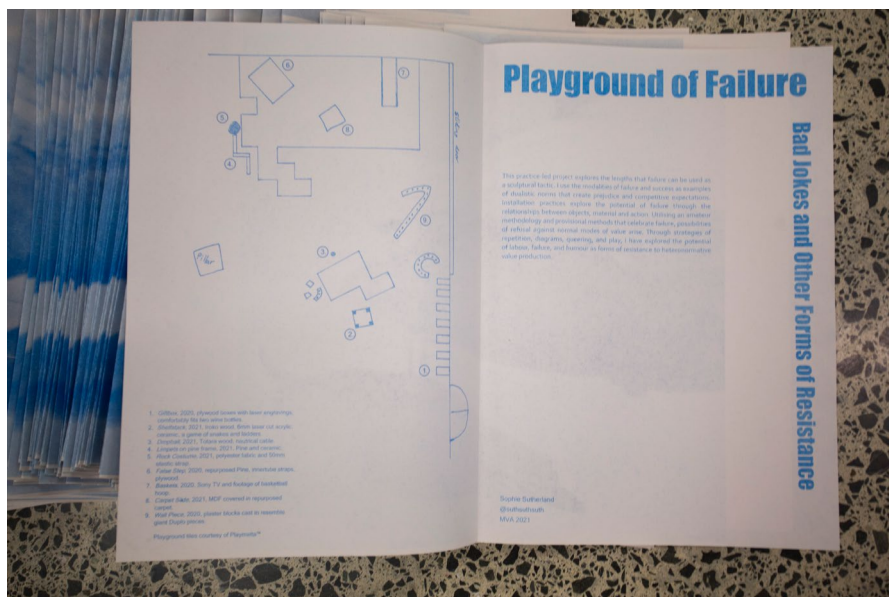




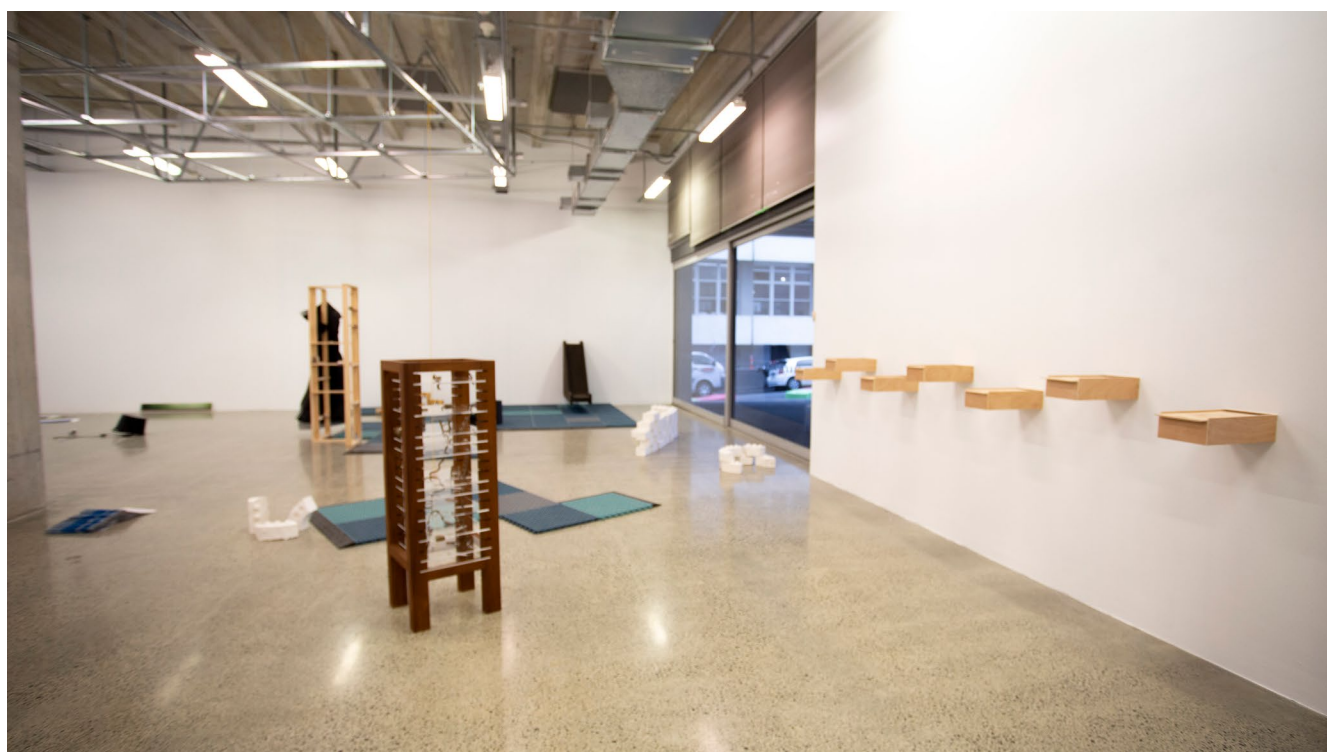




















These two images of the activated Rock Costume took place during the examination process. At the beginning of the examination, I was introduced and initiated the conversation with a two-minute performance in the Rock Costume. After which I hung the work back amongst the installation. Photos by Lucy Meyle.



# ***BIBLIOGRAPHY***

acca\_melbourne. *Laresa Kosloff & Andy Thomson - The Green Text*, 2011. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMAMGw62plQ&ab\\_channel=acca\\_melbourne](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMAMGw62plQ&ab_channel=acca_melbourne).

Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology*. Duke University Press, 2006.

Andre, Carl. *Equivalent*. 1966.

Bracewell, Michael. "Jesus Doesn't Want Me for a Sunbeam." *Frieze* 25 (1995).

Braddock, Christopher. "Alica Frankovich and the Force of Failure." *Column* 5, 2010.

Braddock, Christopher. "Contagious Animism in the Artwork of Felix Gonzales-Torres and Dane Mitchell | Drain Magazine." Accessed May 24, 2020. <http://drainmag.com/contagious-animism-in-the-artwork-of-felix-gonzales-torres-and-dane-mitchell/>.

Collins, Jeff, and Bill Mayblin. *Derrida for Beginners*. Icon Books, 1996.

Condorelli, Celine. "Directions for Use." In *Support Structures*. Sternberg Press, 2009.

Cross, David. "David Cross." Accessed June 13, 2020. <https://www.davidcrossartist.com/artwork/pump>.

Cunnane, Abby. "'Whose Clothes Are Falling in a Pigeon Rain?' | Enjoy Contemporary Art Space." Accessed May 21, 2021. <https://enjoy.org.nz/publishing/exhibition-essays/soft-spot/whose-clothes-are-falling-in-a-pigeon-rain>.

"Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster Born 1965 | Tate." Accessed May 21, 2021. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/dominique-gonzalez-foerster-10354>.

Fer, Briony. "The Scatter: Sculpture as Leftover." In *Part Object Part Sculpture*. Penn State University Press, 2005.

BrainyQuote. "Gertrude Stein Quotes." Accessed May 5, 2021. [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/gertrude\\_stein\\_399613](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/gertrude_stein_399613).

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Space, Time and Perversion*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Halberstam, John. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011.

Haus der Kunst. HDK: Activation of "The New Alphabet / Form Z" (1991) with Franz Erhard Walther and Andrea Lissoni, 2020. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPztnYce7H8&ab\\_channel=HausderKunst](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPztnYce7H8&ab_channel=HausderKunst).

Hester, Bianca. "ACCA: Please Leave These Windows Open Overnight to Enable the Fans to Draw in Cool Air during the Early Hours of the Morning | Bianca Hester." Accessed June 9, 2020. <http://www.biancahester.net/?q=node/53/>.



Hester, Bianca. "Enabling Restraints." VCA Gallery, 2008.

Hester, Bianca, and Charlotte Day. "Five Points of View." ACCA, 2010.

Holmboe, Rye, "Eva Hesse: Studiowork." thisistomorrow. Accessed May 21, 2021. <http://thisistomorrow.info/articles/eva-hesse-studiowork>.

Kale, Neha. "Alicia Frankovich's Backflip: From Child Gymnast to Performance Artist." The Sydney Morning Herald, August 16, 2019. <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/alicia-frankovich-s-backflip-from-child-gymnast-to-performance-artist-20190812-p52g77.html>.

Lask, Thomas. "Publishing: Irving Wallace And His Write-on Family - The New York Times," 1976. <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/10/01/archives/publishing-irving-wallace-and-his-writeon-family.html>.

Le Feuvre, Lisa. "If at First You Don't Succeed, Celebrate: Failure – Tate Etc." Tate. Accessed May 19, 2021. <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-18-spring-2010/if-first-you-dont-succeed-celebrate>.

Meyle, Lucy. "Does a Flower Rehearse for Spring." Auckland University of Technology, 2018.

Millar, Jeremy. *Fischli & Weiss, The Way Things Go*. Afterall Books, 2007.

Perec, George. *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. Penguin Books, 1997.

"SHOW 4 Paul Cullen : SHOW." Accessed June 13, 2020. <https://vjrex.info/show/index.php?/projects/test-4/>.

Shrigley, David. *Monument*. 2016.

"Slacker | Film | The Guardian." Accessed May 21, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/1992/dec/03/1>.

Smith, Allan. "An Art of Possibilities." Centre for Contemporary Art 6, no. 30 (1991).

Thomson, Andy. "Standard Model: Bubbles in the Vacuum." In Weakforce 4. split/fountain publishing, 2016.

Thornton, Sarah. *Seven Days in the Artworld*. W. W. Norton, 2008.

Ulrich Obrist, Hans. *Do It*. Independent Curators International, 2013.

Waerea, Layne. "Free Social Injunctions: Art Interventions as Agency in the Production of Socio-Legal Subjectivities Not yet Imagined or Realised." Exegesis, Auckland University of Technology, 2016.

———. "Layne Waerea [Public Studio]." Layne Waerea [public studio]. Accessed July 2, 2020. <https://laynewaerea.wordpress.com/>.

Wallace, Irving, David Wallechinsky, Sylvia Wallace, and Amy Wallace. *The People's Almanic Presents The Book of Lists 2*. Bantam Books, 1981.

"WE ARE HOUSED (in and around All of This Stuff) | The Physics Room." Accessed May 21, 2021. <http://www.physicsroom.org.nz/exhibitions/we-are-housed-in-and-around-all-of-this-stuff>.