

# sculpture

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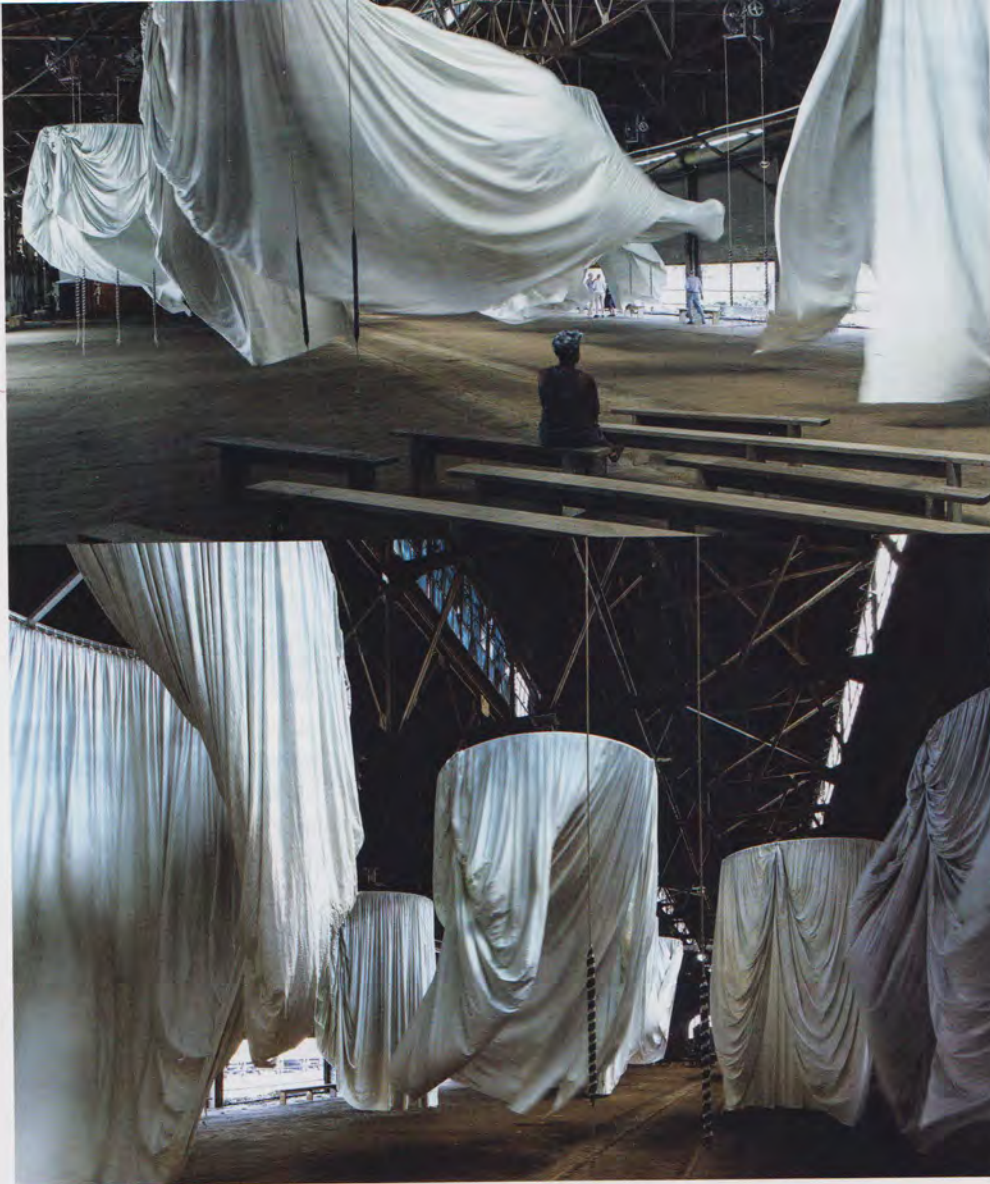


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Ann Hamilton, *habitus*, 2016. 2 views of installation at Municipal Pier 9, Philadelphia.

moved to FWM, where it reprised Hamilton and Stewart's wheel of poetry on the first floor with blurry close-ups of pale blue, capitalized words sewn onto tape. In stilted movements, they inch off screen as new words appear — SWEET, SALT — prompting free association, and reminding us of the conversations that occur when objects become words and words are handled.

—Becky Huff Hunter

#### WASHINGTON, DC

Heather Theresa Clark

Hillyer Art Space

Heather Theresa Clark comes to art-making from the unusual background of urban planning, green development, and ecology. Every component of her installation, *Maintenance*, was carefully engineered to critique “exurban” life as she experiences it in Northern Virginia, being, in her words, “embedded in a landscape that feeds on cultural neurosis.” Clark posits that this neurosis derives from detaching labor from the basic survival needs of shelter, food, and clothing, instead basing exurban planning on consumer consumption.

The gallery was arranged as an opposition between a domestic interior and a domesticated landscape. On the entrance side, hydrangea-print wallpaper with a chair rail and wainscoting below represented petty bourgeois notions of decorating with a nature theme. A circular vortex, with matched flower patterning, cut into a wall projecting about 18 inches into the space. On the other side of the entrance, a wall-mounted monitor screened the video *Exurban Roulette vol. 1*. Filmed as Clark turns pages of a flipbook, the video dramatizes the plight of three Latina women trying to cross a multi-lane suburban roadway to get to work. Clark implies that what should be a

functional, and poetic. Words become objects, and objects express a kind of language.

At FWM, a concise survey of Hamilton's textile-oriented work filled the first floor, after a presentation of Stewart's *CHANNEL* and *MIRROR* poems in installation form. White fabric tape was wound several inches deep on metal wheels; stitched in pale blue on the tape were the words of the poems. As visitors turned a handle, the wheels turned, revealing further words in the poems. Cranked back and forth from wheel to wheel, the poems were revealed as palindromes, making sense in both direction. In the survey proper, viewers encountered the aggressive affect of (*suitable/positioned*) (1984/2014), a man's suit entirely pierced by toothpicks that create a protective shell

and hint at a masculine vulnerability typically concealed by conventional business attire, and the contemplative *untitled* (1992), a concrete poem in which tiny white stones cover, like stitches, each vowel of a small printed manuscript. While the text is near-illegible, the work reaches across forms to be imaginatively read as linguistic sculpture, a text to handle with the eyes.

FWM's second and eighth floors housed collections of antique commonplace books (personal journals of copied or cut-and-pasted literary passages) and fabric sample books borrowed mainly from Philadelphia museums and archives. Viewing these collections in parallel, as analogues, both text and textile swatches documented the construction of individual lives, of subjectivities, and of

cultural moments. Installed on long, low plinths extending along the left-hand side of both spaces, *cloth—a commonplace* (2016)—takeaway, letter-size printouts from the open call on Tumblr—conceptually tied the two floors together. The on-line commonplace project featured excerpts from Virginia Woolf on the acute feeling of loss when there is no one to give a handmade crown to, and from Edith Wharton, who describes layers of lace, cloth panels, and carpet as luxurious class indicators.

The guided exhibition tour—mandatory because of the hundreds of delicate works—concluded on the seventh floor, a cavernous, dark space lit only by a blanket-size video projection at its rear. In November, the *CHANNEL* and *MIRROR* (2016) video originally shown at Pier 9,



Heather Theresa Clark, *Maintenance*, 2017. Bellows, concrete ball, railroad tracks, water fountain, and 4 live canaries, 2 views of installation.

simple pedestrian act requires death-defying courage, thanks to class-discriminatory, car-friendly road patterns.

On the opposite side of the gallery, an attention-grabbing sensory environment was dominated by a huge globe, attached to large bellows. Reached by a short flight of stairs, the conjoined apparatus was stationed in front of a platform supporting a length of railroad track and a working fountain. The sound of gurgling water joined the sound of chirping birds emanating from the live canaries housed in a roomy aviary mounted on the rear wall. Illustrative of the “canary in the coal mine” adage — meaning that small living creatures serve as an early warning system for environmental danger — all these disparate elements seemed to add up to a strong message of condemnation directed at (sub)urban planning.

The act of construction was much in evidence, from the exposed structure of the platform, with the disconnected run of railway track, to the mysterious globe, large enough to provide shelter. The globe was made from a new-tech material called concrete canvas, marketed to the military for construction of rapidly deployable hardened shelters. The attached bellows offered a participatory, but futile gesture — the wet material is shaped by air and hardens into a sturdy enclosure when dry. In contrast, the birds occupied an airy cage open to the elements, but not to the wild. Domesticated nature was also present in the water spurting from the garden statuary fountain.

The rails, shelter, wind, water, and living creatures served as indicators of elemental existence, while the opposing wall literally wallpapered

over the basics. Clark’s examination of the human effort expended in designing infrastructure, moving through the built environment, and feathering the nest seemed to say that we could do better. What does true “maintenance” or care for life look like? Her environmental engineering background gives her an innovative set of artistic tools for probing these issues.

—Laura Roulet

**NEW ORLEANS**  
**Christopher Saucedo**  
**Good Children Gallery**

“Out of my own great woe,” wrote Heinrich Heine, “I make my little songs.” Analogous to the German writer’s transformation of “woe” into poetry, Christopher Saucedo turns natural disasters into prankish sculpture. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina flooded his home in New

Orleans, leaving the living space covered with “exotic, colorful mold.” In 2011, soon after he moved to New York, Hurricane Sandy flooded his house and studio in Rockaway Beach, Queens. These catastrophes nonetheless are but grist for Saucedo’s comic mill. Distant echoes of Pop art and of Magritte inform his latest series, an entertaining spoof of “good” water — in ubiquitous plastic bottles — as opposed to “bad” water — inundations that destroy.

Seeing a helicopter drop drinking water to people standing in filthy flood water during the aftermath of Katrina sparked Saucedo’s focal image — oversize painted Styrofoam replicas of plastic water bottles, neither Fiji nor Perrier, but the generic Wal-Mart kind. Since these objects weigh little, they can also function as floating buoys and navigational devices during a flood. Each is attached by a long rope to an anchor — one a 300-pound boulder, the others real anchors — which provides a weighty contrast. Polystyrene, Saucedo contends, is the “new Renaissance material,” replacing marble and bronze. Lasting forever, it is, moreover, a not-so-subtle reminder of the non-biodegradable plastic “island” said to be swimming in the Pacific.

Saucedo continued his sculptural lampoon with a tall, 10-gallon glass container of water, which he terms a “demonstration tank” — the end-time flood has happened. Bobbing inside is a three-inch scale model of a *Water Bottle Buoy*, it, too, attached to a tiny anchor. Blue boxes stacked near the entrance also played multiple roles. Branded with images of bottles in various sizes, the boxes bring together the antinomies of fire and water; at the same time, they function as shipping crates for

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