A Part Apart
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A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Art in the Department of Furniture Design of the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Rhode Island.

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Master’s Examination Committee:

_______________________________________
Patricia Johnson
Thesis Chair, Department of Furniture Design

_______________________________________
Harry Allen
Thesis Advisor, Harry Allen Design

_______________________________________
Jim Isermann
Thesis Guest Critic, Professor at UC Riverside
I am fascinated by connections. Things that click, snap, slide, and hold. I care about the ways in which objects meet, looking for answers in the space between. What binds one thing to another?

I believe the world is presented to us in pieces. It’s hard to say how it all comes together. It’s easy to believe things are shapeless and detached from each other. Connection is a bridge, a way of linking one thing to another that reveals interdependence, and eventually moves outwards to express a correlation between pieces, once assumed to be discrete and isolated.

This work is interested in exploring the form of connection. What does connection look like, and how can the objects I produce move within and beyond the material world to convey things that may be abstract but are more immediate, including a tie to people and place?

Pulling from a history of art that bridges the space between pop and minimalism, I seek to find ways of expressing links to people and place that are inspired by a web of meaning on the West Coast and beyond.
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Bend Shelf

Plywood, Laminate, Steel Hardware
“Discrete Objects” (An Interview with Jim Isermann)

J: Hi, this is Jim Isermann.

S: Hi, Jim! It’s so great to hear from you. I’m really grateful that you could get back to me. It was kind of a shot in the dark. I’m feeling pretty lucky.

J: Well, the timing worked out right. I’m killing one more week up in Northern California before I head back to teaching.

S: Nice. Where are you in Northern California?

J: I’m in Guerneville. Do you know where that is?

S: Yeah, of course, I used to live in the Bay Area.

J: Oh, okay. Yeah, after ten summers in Palm Springs, I broke down and bought a cabin up here so I can get away from the heat in the summer. I’ve been coming up here for ten or twelve years.

S: That sounds so wonderful. I’m jealous.

J: So I was surprised to see your number was a LA area code. Did you live in LA as well?

S: Yeah, I grew up in Silver Lake in the 90s and early 2000s. My family lives in Eagle Rock now, close to Highland Park. We’ve sort of been in and around Northeast Los Angeles for most of our lives.

J: That’s great. I taught at Occidental College for a couple of years. Oh, wow. And I guess it was in the early 2000s as well. So that’s amazing.

S: Yeah, my family lives a block away from Oxy. That’s hysterical.

J: That’s funny.

S: So I want to keep this super freeform and kind of just get to know a little bit more about your process and your work. I’ve been thinking about your work a lot recently, and I’ve been encountering it in funny ways. I’ve been spending a lot of time in the RISD library, and I first saw one of your pieces in a book.
S (continued): It was called “Furniture, Furnishings, Subject and Object.” It had one of your installations, called “Looking Forward to Tomorrow.” And then I started looking for more of your work in the library, and I realized that you actually curated an exhibition at the RISD Museum in 2001, right?

J: Right, right, I did a show with Judith Tannenbaum, who was the first curator of contemporary art that they ever had. And I had worked with her when a survey show of mine traveled to the ICA in Philadelphia, where she was previously. It was very funny because she called me out of the blue and asked me if there’s anything, you know, a material or something I’ve wanted to work with. And I had just done a project using an inkjet carpet tile that was designed for high traffic areas. She wanted me to do something with the collection. I don’t know if you’re familiar with this, but they did a show with Warhol in the early 70s. It was called “Raid the Icebox,” and it was supposed to be the first of a series of exhibitions, allowing artists to go through their collection and display pieces from the archives. What he did horrified them so much that they never did a second version of that show. I guess he just dragged all kinds of crates into the main gallery and made it look like a flea market.

S: He was a serious troublemaker.

J: Yeah. So she wanted to kind of revise that idea and become familiar with the collection. So I flew out and we went through the storage facility and looked at all this stuff. And I designed this carpet tile that, depending on how you laid it down, could create several different patterns. So we carpeted that entire main gallery and made plinths and other kinds of raised areas that were for specific decorative objects. The show included painting, sculpture, and decorative objects that resonated with my interest in pattern and hard edge geometry. That was really fun to do.

S: Yeah, I think of you as an artist that reminds me a lot of home in a way, of California. And I don’t want to force you into some sort of regionalist art movement, but seeing your work here at RISD gave me a strange sense of comfort and familiarity. It was exciting to discover that connection between your work and RISD. But it’s funny, hearing you talk about this carpet tile, the plans, and the way you staged all the objects that you selected because one of the things that I really love about your practice is this initial desire to create an immersive environment, or the “total work of art” that you talk about in your interview for Radius Books. Right now I’m in the midst of developing my thesis body of work, and I’m thinking about having to make this “total work of art,” or an immersive environment, with
S (continued): these objects that are in communication with each other. I’m wondering how you go about building a collection of objects or an environment. Do you usually start with a single object and then sort of build from there? Or do you have a fully cohesive vision, maybe sketched out or diagrammed, and then you start to build once you have an idea of everything that’s going to be involved?

J: That’s a good question. It’s been kind of a trial and error process for 40 years. And when I first started doing them, a lot of it had to do with the time I was in grad school at CalArts. Painting and drawing were very much out of fashion. And I found it very hard to think of what I was doing in terms of discrete objects. Even though I was doing things that could be relegated as painting and drawing, or even sculpture, I always thought of them in terms of this installation. And it took me probably 10 years after I was out of grad school to start to think of them as individual objects. So everything was always thought of as this group. I would think of them as tableaus or things that belong together. But then, of course, it’s a very problematic thing for a gallery to show something like that, that can’t be broken up. So there was always the tacit understanding that yes, of course, it could be broken up and things could be separated.

Some of the first things I did were very much tied to the site that they were exhibited. And so that would kind of limit the number of objects and sometimes it was about recreating another type of space other than a gallery space. And then when I got tired of that, I tried to do things that worked in a gallery. Doing public commissions and projects that were more site specific strangely allowed my studio practice to become more conventional in a sense, where the work could much more easily be seen as individual objects.

S: Yeah. Are you talking about the installations that you did for the Metro Center at Wilshire and Long Beach, and SITE in Santa Fe? Is that what you’re referencing?

J: SITE was temporary. But things were very much tied to a specific place. Since then, I did this crazy piece for the Dallas Cowboys Stadium. There’s something I really like about getting work outside of a gallery or outside of a museum where people have the chance to see it multiple times and have this different type of relationship with it. And it was funny, because I think I talked about this in the interview, there was such a problem with making my furniture and people not knowing how it should function in their homes. I would try to think about them as prototypes for something that could be mass produced, even though that never happened.
J (continued): This was just my way of kind of relinquishing it from being this rarefied object.

S: Yeah, definitely. Something that I find super interesting, just in general, is how your work moves really fluidly between gallery spaces and public spaces. I mean, this approach is definitely tied into your interest in breaking down the distinctions between the Avant and the Popular in many ways. I don’t know if that’s fair to say.

J: Well, it’s very funny. I’m glad you saw the Radius book, because almost all my thoughts are in there somewhere. I was very much interested in the past.

I’m retiring from teaching this year and I’m teaching a few of my favorite subjects this Fall. I’m trying to not do what I’ve done for years and think about them in a slightly different way. And so from reading the book, I’m sure you came across my interest in Camp. And as a grad student, I was very much interested in the past, and I had tunnel vision about what I was interested in. And I didn’t really know what it meant. I was very much aware of people having already lived through those things and having zero interest in what it was I was doing. And at the same time, I was really interested in the kind of failure, specifically about the failure of Modernism. At that time, it was before its huge resurgence. I felt like I was in this kind of uncharted area trying to put together this past, which now has been completely mined. I think about this because I teach, and so many of my students have interests in things that I don’t understand. So I feel like my position has been reversed since the time I was a student, and I find that really interesting. Things are very different today, the way the past is sifted through now with the internet, and the ability to look at things without any kind of context.

S: Yeah, it seems like there’s a lot of assemblage and collage of styles and time periods going on right now. I think it’s interesting that you talk about the failure of modernism, because a lot of what you talk about in your manifesto speaks to a desire for logic and organization. And I think there’s a real optimism to your work that reminds me of modernism. And that’s something that, from my perspective, I’m not saying that I’m a pessimist, but I find sort of refreshing because I don’t know if I can think of many designers today that consider themselves to be sincere optimists, if that makes sense.

J: Yeah, I’m sure they’re out there. I have some friends who are very committed designers and are doing things that I find interesting. But if you’re really in the business, it’s so tied to sales and reaching the market. One of the benefits of being an artist is hopefully not having to do that.
S: I think, in many ways, it’s essential. I want to be optimistic about the work that I’m making. And I think that a good place to start working from is from a place of optimism. Although there may be a reignited interest in modernism, design discourse is still very critical of it, understandably. But that element of optimism is something that I think about a lot in relation to modernism and something that I don’t necessarily see as much in a lot of postmodern work.

J: Right. I think that’s absolutely right. And having grown up in Southern California, you lived among it. I mean, Los Angeles is obviously one of the best sites in the world for postmodern design.

One of the reasons I moved to Palm Springs was to actually get away from some of that. And, you know, when I bought a house out there in 97, it was kind of a modern ruin. It was really fantastic to see all these incredible pieces of architecture that were just falling apart that someone like me could buy and restore. I mean, that’s completely changed now. But I was very much drawn to the optimism of the architects working there. Postmodernism really introduced cynicism and irony into art and design in a way that it didn’t exist before. And I don’t think the design world has ever recovered from that.

S: Yeah, that’s really interesting. Okay, let me think. I’m trying to find a way to transition into some of my other questions, but maybe it’ll just feel contrived. I apologize for that.

J: Oh, just go ahead. Give me whatever questions you have.

S: Okay. Okay. One of them is sort of an interest in your approach to working with materials. I’m kind of curious about whether or not you feel a particular attachment to any material. Because you work with such a broad range of materials, I was just wondering if there’s maybe one or two in particular that you quite love working with?

J: Well, it’s very funny, you know, the kind of progression through materials in the 80s and 90s were kind of pragmatic in terms of trying to figure out different ways of assembling pattern. I was actually trying to move away from materials that too closely read as pop culture that people couldn’t look at the possible beauty of it. The stained glass windows were the first ones where I tried to do that, but they were so incredibly painful to make, and they introduced all these issues about fragility, and just the difficulty of storing and moving them that I had a primal urge to work with something that could fold up and be put away easily.
J (continued): And I made those hand sewn pieces, which led to me acquiring a loom and doing these woven pieces. I never set out to follow such a linear progression. But that's what happened.

It was strange putting the book together, and looking at all this stuff in such an intense way that I hadn't done before. And then, of course, with the pandemic, I had just completed a body of work. So when the shutdown happened, I was in my studio with no materials, and not in the middle of anything. And I remembered having very fond memories of doing those hand sewn pieces. And I had scraps from another project. So I took on this gigantic handsewn work that I did during the first year of the lockdown. It was very meditative. But in terms of being able to do it, I just did not have the dexterity that I had when I was, you know, 30 years old. So it ended up taking me like six months to make this piece instead of you know, however long it took when I did it in the 90s.

S: When you say hand-sewn pieces, are you talking about the latch hook wall hangings? Or is this separate?

J: I think I call them wall hangings in the book. They follow the stained glass work. So they’re from the early 90s. And some of them are made up of hundreds of pieces of fabric and it's almost like a quilt top. You wouldn't know this from looking at the images, but they’re all hand sewn. There’s no machine.

I think one thing I could add in terms of materials is that I’m more practical because I’ve done so many public works in the last 15 to 20 years. There’s this issue about reliability and structure that’s very different when I’m working with fabricators. And so it was so much less about what I already knew. Now it’s more about understanding these different kinds of materials and the team that I usually work with helps me figure those things out.

S: Yeah, so you are presented with a challenge and then have to, in a lot of ways, just find the right solution. It’s a very design-minded approach to making work in some ways.

J: I’ve always had a kind of pragmatic way about doing it. But it was much more dependent on my own particular ability to force these materials to do what I want, and approach them without the kind of baggage that comes with studying them in school or whatever. When I made stained glass, I was very self conscious of craftspeople looking at them and being critical of how well they were made. But working with fabricators is really different.
J (continued): It’s still about trying to get this kind of seamless transition from my cardboard models into, you know, folded and powder coated steel or aluminum.

S: Yeah, definitely. Okay, let me just dive right into the next one. One of the other things that I’ve sort of been thinking about too, is how you really sort of gracefully navigate between a lot of tension in your work, or, balance of opposites. I think you have a love of minimalism and modernism, but then you also express a love of ornamentation and pattern and camp. My design education has sort of taught me that those are diametrically opposed. Yet I see you incorporating both. In many ways that surprised me. And I’m wondering if you see them, or had ever seen these ideas as being in conflict with each other? Or if you always saw them as something that sort of meshed well?

J: That’s a really good way of putting it. Well, first of all, I’m very drawn to the logic and the beauty of all the things I make. I’m never trying to make something that’s ugly, something assaultive in that way, but at the same time, I think I’ve always been interested in pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable taste. It’s funny, all these things that I make look very at home in my studio or my living environment. And so often I’m unaware of how much they clash with the rest of the world. I think I have this funny story in the book about somebody buying one of my flower paintings and then returning it because it looked so out of place.

S: I remember reading that at one point, I was shocked. I mean, what else were they collecting?

J: It looks so benign now. But this was 1986. And this was actually a very respected collector in LA. He’s very embarrassed about it now and wishes he had that painting. And I’m always collecting quotes about beauty and about camp. There’s a really great quote I found a couple years ago about how beauty is always seen as strange and ugly the first time you see it, because it’s new, and you don’t understand that. I can’t claim to be able to do that, but that’s certainly an experience that I’m interested in.

S: Yeah, definitely. That was a really helpful answer. I’m also sort of thinking about your education at CalArts. And some of your inspirations that you talk about in your interview include Sister Corita Kent and Barbara Solomon. I’m wondering if you could locate your inspiration? Does it feel like it’s mostly coming from the West Coast?

J: Yeah I do think a lot of it is based on the West Coast.
J (continued): It was very funny growing up in the Midwest, because it’s such a different thing. I was always attracted to California without knowing why or why California looked the way it did. And so when I moved here to go to grad school, I just felt like this is where I was meant to be. When I got out of grad school, I tried living in New York. After three months, I would just dream about driving my car. Very weird, so I came back, which was very difficult to do in 1980, because there was such a tiny art scene in LA. All the people I met at Cal Arts moved to New York. But it ended up being a good move for me. I spent a lot of time going to thrift stores and going to swap meets and finding different design objects. And a lot of it did originate in California, which was really great. But there was also an incredible bounty of knockoffs of all these things. I was, at that time, equally interested in those as well. Now, maybe a little bit less. So it’s strange.

Now I have this kind of fantasy or I don’t know what, maybe a fascination with folk art, like work made by people who are untrained and make work outside of the art world. And it was weird, I was in Wisconsin for a family reunion. And we were renting this vacation home in Sheboygan, which is near the Kohler Art Center. And I don’t know if you know about this new museum they opened a year or two ago. But one of the Koehlers had this incredible fascination with unschooled artists, but in particular, artists who created environments. And they began collecting this work in mass. If one of these artists died, and the family didn’t know what to do with the environment, they would acquire the entire thing. And the most famous one, I think, maybe you’ve heard of, is this woman. I think her name was Mary Nohl, and she lived in Fox Point, which is northeast of Milwaukee, which became a kind of fancy neighborhood. And people hated driving by and seeing this yard full of concrete sculptures, and this house painted with these patterns on it. The very idea of creating these things that you live in is just so close to home for me. So if you ever find yourself there, I think you would really enjoy this museum.

S: Yeah, definitely. Oh, I’ll look into it.

J: Yeah, they have the Art Center, but this new one is called the Preserve.

S: Very cool. I guess that sort of also feeds into another question that I have. My understanding is that conversations around art and craft, or applied arts, are pretty thoroughly blurred today. But I’m wondering when you were making work, like in the 80s, and 90s, was it kind of hard to convince people that they were all connected? Was that something that you had to fight for? Or did people see that the applied arts and the fine arts were married?
J: Well, there certainly were a number of people doing that, you know, before me, and at the same time, and so now, it doesn’t seem like much of a big deal. I was really interested in the work of Scott Burton. And one of the things he did that I was unable to do was the way he moved seamlessly between all these different design eras. I thought that was really fascinating. In terms of picking and choosing things to kind of quote in his work. I was very impressed with that, and the function was so important to him. I mean, I think that’s been removed from some of his work now because it’s in museum collections. But he was really adamant that when things were exhibited, you could sit in them. So it was never about removing that from it. And I dealt with that, as well.

Early on, I did a furniture piece that was to be used, and it really changed the way I looked at it. And since then, it’s very rare for me to make furniture work for a gallery show because I don’t want to have that conversation about whether you can use it or not. I just want it to function. And I guess the other thing, of course, in terms of all of this is, being a gay man, and talking about how these things exist, are they able to pass as art, or pass as design, or pass as something else? These kinds of dual identities communicate in different ways to different people. It’s always been a very difficult thing to talk about. I’ve only ever been included in one gay exhibition, and it was called “Gay Men Love Chairs.” It was a show that Cary Leibowitz curated. There were a number of occasions where people I knew were organizing these huge gay survey shows, and I was not included, and it always drove me crazy that my work couldn’t be perceived that way at that time.

S: You mention Scott Burton as a reference. It’s interesting, because if I didn’t have the context of his performance and writing in conjunction with his work, I wouldn’t know that he was a queer man in many ways. I’m curious to know if you feel like you are expressing identity in your pieces, or if that is a driving force for your work? This is something that I sort of struggle to reconcile right now as well. How much of my identity am I bringing to the pieces I’m making?

J: Right, I definitely do. But when I was doing this work in the 80s and 90s, I didn’t know how to talk about it. I don’t think there was quite the language to do it. Obviously there’s lots of artists who were queer and it’s easier to look back now, and look at the work of a number of people. You know, Jim Hodges and Felix Gonzalez Torres, even. But, I have to say this has been one of the most incredible things about teaching for me, is that I’m constantly having to re-evaluate everything and stay on top of things to work with my grad students. John Burtle, who interviewed me in the book, was a grad student of mine and we had the most amazing conversations about all of this.
J (continued): And I owe a huge debt to working with him and other grad students to continually re-examine how being queer can be embedded in your work without it being the dominant subject of the work.

S: Maybe I’m making this up, but I remember you talking about “Cruising Utopia” by José Esteban Muñoz at one point in your interview, and that’s a book that I remember reading in undergrad. I was surprised to hear you reference that as well.

J: Well, it was really funny. That was actually the best thing to happen to me during the pandemic. We started a queer theory book club, and it was just four of us. Me, John Burtle, another ex-grad student and a current grad student. That was the first book we read, because a number of them had tried to read it but found it difficult to do on their own. We had lots of criticisms, but we all loved it. For me, I just thought, wow, this is practically a guide book on how to make work and think about work as a queer artist. And I thought there was nothing like this for me to read when I was 25 years old. I was really moved by it. For about a year and a half, we met weekly and talked about the books we were reading.

S: There are other queer designers I can think of that only now are able to talk about their work in relation to their identity because of this new language. It does feel like a relatively new discourse that has opened up and informed the way queer artists and designers articulate their practice.

J: It’s kind of amazing. One of the other members of the book club is the artist David Gilbert. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen his work. He’s a photographer. He’s queer, and the work has a very strong queer ethos about it. It’s basically all these constructed scenes, but there’s no men in them. I think they’re really amazing. Wayne Koestenbaum wrote a really beautiful article about his work for Artforum a couple of years ago. I was so happy for David that the work was discussed in ways that were so important to him.

S: So cool. I’ll look into his work, too. On the subject of teaching, well first of all congratulations on finishing up your teaching career at UC Riverside this year. I am however curious to know if you saw teaching as an extension of your practice?

J: Well, it’s very funny, I never wanted to teach. I never had any desire to teach. I guess it was more common then, but I went straight through from undergrad to grad school. So when I got out of grad school, I was only 25. And the last thing I wanted to do was have anything to do with an institution. And I didn’t start teaching until 15 years later.
J (continued): I was friends with Charles Ray because we'd shown at the same Gallery in New York at the time, and he was teaching at UCLA at the time. A faculty member went on sabbatical, and he asked me if I wanted to come and teach and I was petrified. At the time, I was either living off my work or doing house painting to get by. So I thought I'd give it a shot, and teaching at UCLA, I was completely spoiled. I mean, the undergrads, they are the best. It's the only school I've gone to or that I've taught at where it actually made a difference. I mean, it was so competitive to get in there. I'm sure RISD is like that, where you've got people who really want to be artists. And so they're committed in a way that's very different from most universities. But it was kind of a fluke that I ended up in this tenure track job at UC Riverside. And they never had a sculpture professor before. They ended up hiring Charles Long and myself to set up this area. So we got to write the curriculum and think about what we wanted to impart as part of the first sculpture classes, so it was a very rare opportunity.

I have zero memories of the sculpture classes I took as an undergrad—I don't know what we did in those classes, but I wanted to change that and hopefully expose students to something that they might remember years later. I never thought I was particularly articulate in regards to talking about art, art history, or the history of sculpture. And so this forced me to not only read and think about these things, but try and figure out a way to present them to undergrads so that they could process it in their own way. So, in the end, it was super helpful for me because I had such tunnel vision about what I was interested in. I still teach classes like that, where I only talk about the things that interest me the most. In these general sculpture classes, it forced me to look at what I do in a broader context, and try to find connections between all these things.

S: I guess, was there a different context that you were working in as a grad student? Were you a painting student? Is that what you studied? I actually don't know.

J: Well, it was funny, CalArts was famous for having this program called “Post-Stu- dio.” It was all about making work beyond these rigid categories. Your idea or concept was paramount, and then you would choose whatever media was best for expressing it. That was kind of the dominant sensibility when I was there. And I have to say, I was one of a small handful of students who were actually physically making objects. And I came in with the idea that I was a painter, but really, by the time I left, I was making three dimensional things.

I worked a lot with Judy Pfaff, who was teaching there. The first year I was there, she was very influential.
J (continued): And then the second year, I primarily worked with Barbara Kruger, and Vija Celmins, who were both visiting instructors. And it was right before Barbara Kruger started making what she became world famous for, and Vija Celmins was just this incredible force. It was the last time she taught in California before moving to New York. I think she moved to New York in 1980, or 81. So I was one of the people who ended up at CalArts, not knowing who all these famous conceptual artists were, and luckily got to work with them. They were very supportive about what I was doing. But I ended up primarily working with the women who were teaching there.

S: Yeah, I was about to say I remember looking into the faculty that were teaching at the time, and it’s wild to hear you say that you worked with Vija Celmins and Barbara Kruger. I can’t even imagine what it’s like to talk to them.

J: Oh, honestly they were both so incredible and open and able to talk about anything. Barbara Kruger, especially, was so willing to talk in depth about whatever anybody was doing. And she didn’t have a style or way of working at that time, so nobody was intimidated by that aspect of her. She was extremely approachable.

S: That’s so exciting to hear.

J: Well, you just never know who it is you’re working with. I always think UC Riverside is the best kept secret in the UC system. The undergrads who come here have no idea who is teaching them. And because it’s such a small program, all the tenure faculty teach undergrad classes. Some of them bother to figure out who it is who’s teaching them, but a lot of them are just kind of oblivious to the caliber of artists who are working with them.

S: Yeah, I mean, it’s the same with UC Irvine in a lot of ways too. There’s just a shocking number of really impressive and talented faculty members in the UC system.

J: Did you go to undergrad in California?

S: Yeah, I went to UC Berkeley for my undergrad. I studied Urban Planning and design actually. And then I pivoted into object making and set design. But there is a big Art History department at UC Berkeley. The Art Practice department itself is very small and largely underfunded. So there weren’t that many practicing artists that were going to UC Berkeley when I attended school.
J: Right, right. Yeah, I had a friend who taught in the Landscape Architecture program there. Obviously, that and Architecture are still very big there.

S: Yeah, definitely. I actually think those are most of my questions.

J: Okay, well feel free to email me if you think of something. And good luck with everything.

S: Thank you again, so much, just for all your time.

J: Oh, no, this was really very nice. I’m in the middle of putting my syllabus together for this class that starts next week. I put it off until the last minute. So this is kind of helpful for me to get back on track.

S: Well, I’m glad I guess I could distract you for one more minute. But thanks again. And yeah, if I have any more questions I’ll send you an email. It was really, really great to hear from you.

J: Oh, no problem. If you find yourself in Palm Springs, give me a holler.

S: Yeah, will do.


S: All right. Bye, Jim. Thank you.
Jacob’s Ladder
Made in collaboration with Kareno Kim and Eon Son
Steel, Plywood, Felt, Cotton Webbing
I see things in parts.

Andrea Zittel speaks of systems, and the ways in which they can be liberating: “What makes us feel liberated is not total freedom, but rather living in a set of limitations that we have created and prescribed for ourselves,” (Zittel). It sounds old-fashioned, but I think there is truth to this idea, that freedom can be found within constraints.

Think about our speech. The English language, for example, is made up of 26 characters. Let’s think about them as modules. Depending on how you arrange them, they can take on new shapes and meanings. Here, the user matters. How is language being employed? To describe, to uplift, to connect? How can we design systems that support spontaneous growth and a sense of interrelatedness?

The only problem with systems is when they become rigid, inflexible and unbending. This is when they become oppressive.

A system should be flexible, and allow for adaptation, growth, and change. A system is a foundation for the roots to take hold, a trellis for the plant to grow and twist around.

A Brief List of Thoughts That Can Be Re-Arranged
Things are never discrete, they belong to something bigger. This is a system, a set of interconnected elements that inform and interact with one another.

The grid is not inherently evil. Superstudio spoke about the grid as an ambiguous, potentially liberating tool. For them, “The coexistent grid and its [...] inhabitants optimized the possibility of the erasure of their existing society and subsequent founding of a new world that the radicals sought,” (Rossi, 64). With the grid, you can always build something new, and fashion it in the way you see fit. Make the world your own.

Numbers, language, etc all belong to a system. Our world, and the way in which we navigate our lives, is informed by systems of all kinds. Maybe it’s because of my background—I spent a large part of my undergraduate education in the world of urban planning. The grid comes to mind.

This quote from John Baldessari stays with me: “I think my idea is this: not so much structure that it’s prohibiting movement, there’s no wiggle room, but not so loose that it could be anything. I guess it’s like a coral, a coral around your idea. That you can move but not too much. And it’s that limited movement which promotes creativity,” (Art21). Can structure support creativity?
It seems contradictory, to seek freedom through structure. The modernists revealed the danger in applying systems in a top-down manner, dismissing people’s specificity, their humanity, in favor of homogeneity. It is possible to create systems, however, that are not prescriptive.

Modularity can support ideas of flexibility and individuality. Three examples come to mind:

1. Ken Isaacs’ *Living Structures* were constructed from a basic grid, or “matrix,” that gave users the freedom to customize the unit according to their needs (Snodgrass).

2. Ettore Sottsass’ *Mobile, Flexible, Environment* used the concept of modular systems to explore a “horizontal” (non-hierarchical), equal existence of things, rather than a traditionally “vertical” approach to interior layouts and domestic living, with strict divisions between inside/outside.

Distinctions between public/private are broken by the ability to create loose, porous environments across an open space.
Mächtig refers to the word “Metamorphosis”—what he defines as “a phenomenon of transformation, a change in substance, shape, idea”—as a guiding tenet for his design work, (Vardjan 2017, 60). This may also be a tenet for flexible systems.

Mächtig introduces a more spiritual quality to the idea of systems. This abstract idea of “Metamorphosis” points to ideas in which categories and boxes almost always undo themselves, yet they offer a way of navigating the world. Things are always changing, but we can use systems, a kind of structure, to find our way.

(3) Saša J. Mächtig’s *Kiosk 67* brought modularity to the scale of urban planning: consisting of one repeated unit, the Kiosk employed design elements such as flexibility, impermanence, and adaptability to allow for a system that could accommodate a variety of needs over time, including a beehive in Yugolsavia.

Mächtig refers to the word “Metamorphosis”—what he defines as “a phenomenon of transformation, a change in substance, shape, idea”—as a guiding tenet for his design work, (Vardjan 2017, 60). This may also be a tenet for flexible systems.
Is there a consistent/historical desire for logical systems? Desire is an interesting and elusive thing that escapes rationality and logic itself. We should always remain skeptical of investment in certain types of structures and systems, particularly ones that prescribe or dictate how we should live.

The desire for systems of knowledge and understanding, like language, or math, or science, reveals an interesting element of the human condition. This is not something that is shameful, but can carry a kind of beauty simply because it is. What does a system look like that organizes things that are intangible, like spirituality?

In reference to the 1966 exhibition “Primary Structures,” Scott Burton writes “The Primary Structurists uses repeated identical units in a deliberately simple way. Their music would be that of Erik Satie, one phrase repeated a hundred or a thousand times. Satie’s statement, ‘Experience is a form of paralysis,’ applies to this style, which shrinks experience by reducing its variety to a minimum, or when it retains parts, turns them into modules. This is not anti-human, by the way; some say of this style that it is estranged and mute but others say that it is tranquil and meditative. It is certainly elegant, often beautiful in fresh ways,” (Burton, 65).

I’m interested in how things that are typically considered “rigid,” like systems, interact and engage with people and their organically unfolding lives. I think there’s a misconception that things like language or geometry have certain rules, when I believe they are actually malleable.

How do our messy lives move within and through things that try to build structure and meaning?
This demonstration was designed to illustrate the malleability of language, with the letter as the “module,” and the space as the “grid” or foundation for spontaneous acts of creativity and collaboration. I was inspired by Barbara Solomon, architect and environmental designer who invented Supergraphics as an art form in the 1970s, as well as Concrete Poets. Four groups of letters and symbols were placed around the room. Participants were asked to manipulate the letters, their formal qualities, and their meanings in physical space. Linguistic symbols were collectively expressed as clever compositions or graphic wayfinding tools.
Part II
“It’s Material” (An Interview with Shin Okuda of Waka Waka)

SA: Hi Shin!

SO: Hey, how are you? Sorry, I had to pick some colors for a project.

SA: Oh, I’m good, it’s great to hear your voice. Thank you so much for getting back to me.

SO: Of course.

SA: You’re in your studio right now?

SO: Yup.

SA: Nice, I read somewhere that your studio is in Frogtown, right?

SO: Yeah, but we moved recently to Atwater, which is close by. You have a “323” area code?

SA: Yeah, I grew up in Silver Lake originally.

SO: Oh, ok.

SA: Yeah, my dad actually had a photo studio in Atwater. It was on Glendale Boulevard. On the main strip where all the shops are now, like Proof, and Dune. That’s essentially where I grew up.

I’m calling because I’m in a furniture design program here at RISD and I’m reaching out to people I admire, and look up to when I’m thinking about work that inspires me. I was recently thinking about your work and how I had encountered it a few times when I was living in Los Angeles. I think I actually saw some of your pieces in person for the first time at Owl Drug Bookstore? I don’t know if it’s still there, but it was on Figueroa St., in Highland Park.

SO: Oh yeah, they are still there, but I don’t think they are operating as a bookstore anymore. But, the parent company is called the Cinderella Production Company. Long story short, the owner started Flamingo Estate, and I think they turned it into more of a retail store, not just a bookstore. Still not open yet, though.
Outline Chair

Steel, Plywood, Foam, Corduroy
SA: It was definitely a very impressive and immersive store installation and design. I think that was a big inspiration for me when I entered grad school.

So I want to keep this very open ended and have it flow naturally, but I do have a few questions for you that I would love to ask!

SO: Yeah, of course.

SA: I think there is a rigorous attention to detail with the furniture and objects you make, but there is also a certain lightness and approachability to a lot of the work, and that’s something that’s really hard to pull off well. I’m wondering how you begin your process?

SO: Well, when I design stuff, I have to remind myself that it’s material, it’s furniture, it’s 3-D. So it’s not just a drawing, it has a mass, right? It’s the balance. Sometimes, I want my pieces to look more heavy in some ways, but then other times I want them to look lighter. You know, in general, contemporary design seems to be interested in “lightness.” Even in architecture, there’s post and beams, and glass—things with big mass—but you gotta make it look light. So I think the direction of architecture is the same as furniture design. People sit and use a chair, so you have to have a certain mass and structure. But how can I make it look light and interesting? One way to do it is to decorate something, like over the top, but that’s the designer’s choice. But in general, I want to make my pieces look light, because the material I use, baltic birch plywood, is a big and heavy material.

SA: Ok, so it’s a visual balance?

SO: Yeah, but sometimes I want a design to feel massive.

SA: You are kind of talking around ideas of intuition. When you’re thinking about a piece, do you decide in the moment if you want something to feel heavier or lighter? When do you know something is balanced?

SO: Well, I think it depends on the project.

SA: It’s an impossible question to answer, maybe. You’re invested in an element of balance, and you want every piece to feel balanced, even if it’s light or heavy. But do you find that balance in the making of the object? As you work through it in the studio? Or is it planned beforehand? Maybe you sketch or make a rough mock up of your idea? How do you find balance with material?
SO: Beforehand, I have a general idea of what I want to make. Then I start designing, and realize “Oh, I want to make it look a little lighter” or “It needs to feel a little more heavy here.” I have a general idea before I start designing, but I find balance by making it. If you don’t try anything, it will never work. You gotta believe in your intuition. Usually you can figure it out on the first or second try. By the third or fourth you never really get it.

Once you get your language going, you kind of know your taste and what you like. But until you figure that out, you have to design many many things.

SA: Yeah, was there a period of time where you were experimenting or playing a lot to find your language of forms? Was there a lot of time spent trying to get to the place you’re in now? I think you have a very clear vision and visual language, and you return to similar forms that build on each other. I’m just wondering if you tried a lot of stuff that “didn’t work”? Was there a trial and error period before you found your footing?

SO: Well, when I started designing and producing my own work, the 80s was a strong influence. Mid-2000s stuff as well. Now, it’s too much.

I’m not a fashion designer, but there are trends, and then there are things that I want to make. And so, things that I want to make are probably influenced by what other people are doing at this moment. So that is also a fine balance. You know, younger designers start catching up, and you have to move forward with them.

I want to make new stuff, but it’s just organic how I make things, and respond to different influences. At the end of the day, you kind of have to have your own language.

SA: Yeah, but you do feel like you’re in conversation when you’re making stuff? Are you “talking” to other designers when you’re making work?

SO: I don’t see so much of other people’s stuff, and I don’t know if that’s a good or bad thing. But I do like to see old stuff. I like to see contemporary work and also Art Nouveau or even older work. When I have to make a new chair, I don’t really look at chairs or chair books. I look at something completely random. Like, I see something in the world and think “this detail is really nice,” and then I have an idea for a new chair.

SA: Yeah, it’s really important to find inspiration outside of the world of design.
SA (continued): Are you looking at everyday things that inspire you? Or are there small moments, maybe you see that detail somewhere outside and you want to incorporate it into your work?

SO: Like, what I’m experiencing, even right now, offers inspiration. I’m standing in a parking lot, and looking at a fence across the street. And I’m thinking, “That detail is really interesting,” and I will probably remember that somewhere in my brain.

SA: It’s important to pull from resources outside of furniture books.

SO: Yeah, after the pandemic, I went to Japan for the first time in three years. And I didn’t really think about it, but when I got there, my mind was in a different space. I wasn’t thinking about work, although I was still corresponding with people at my shop. But still, I was completely outside of my daily life, and my mind was so much more open. Just being in a different environment, looking at buildings and doorknobs, is inspiring.

SA: Yeah, I remember reading somewhere too, that you pull a lot of inspiration from Japan and your experience growing up there, referencing Japanese carpentry in your work. And you talk about one of your influences, including your interest in Memphis? Do you still find inspiration in Memphis?

SO: I think the concept of Memphis is really inspiring. It’s all about surface treatment, you know? How far can you go with just the surface? When you look at someone like Sottsass, you don’t even have to categorize his stuff within Memphis design, because he’s just a good designer.

SA: Yeah, he’s always been a huge inspiration for me, too. I think Memphis can be written off in contemporary furniture design as a sort of homogenous style, even though everyone in the group was distinctly different in a lot of ways. Even Peter Shire is a very different designer than Sottsass.

SO: Yeah, exactly. I think the concept is really interesting. How to treat the surface of what you have. So mass is good, because you have more surface to show. But it’s a revival of the 80s, which was a great time for design. I still like Shiro Kuramata’s stuff. But if you just categorize that design as “Memphis,” it becomes kind of boring.

SA: I know, there’s so many talented people in that group.
SO: Yeah, when you see them as individual designers, they’re just good designers.

SA: I guess this is sort of on the topic of growing up in Japan. I know you studied literature at Chiba University. I’m wondering, how did you find your way to woodworking from there?

SO: Well, I was always handy. And I always liked making stuff. My grandpa, too, was always making things. He went to war, so he didn’t have many possessions. He just naturally made, for example, hangers to hang clothes. He made them with wire. They didn’t look pretty, but they functioned as a hanger. I always thought they were really cool, like a line drawing that’s not perfect.

But anyways, I was exposed to what my grandpa made, because he was always around. So he was an influence on me, even though I went to school for literature. Then when I came to the states in 1998, I was doing a lot of random jobs. I started working for a few different sculptors as a fabricator. I worked for Jorge Pardo the longest. He made many furniture pieces as art pieces. His work made me think furniture was a really interesting area to explore.

When I quit his studio, I helped with many photoshoots and did some staging for the photoshoots, picking up furniture all around town. I was able to see many different types of furniture pieces. That was a good experience, too, because in Los Angeles, if you go to a Modernica warehouse, you see all of the iconic pieces, and if you go to a prop house, you can pick up a Victorian chair.

I did that for a good couple of years. and then when I met my wife, she just opened up her store, so I started making my own pieces to put in the store, and people started buying it. So that’s how it started. I never really thought, “I’m going to be a furniture designer,” it just kind of happened.

SA: Well that’s pretty amazing. Do you still feel like collaboration with your wife is a really big part of your work?

SO: Oh, yeah, absolutely. I ask her all the time, like “What do you think?” She also buys books all the time. Books are everywhere in the house and in the studio. My point is, the books she buys naturally interest me too. She is definitely a big influence.

SA: I was reading somewhere, too, and I hope this isn’t too prying, but I read somewhere that you are color blind? Is that correct?
SO: Yes, I am color blind. I was with her right now, before you called, so she could help me pick colors.

SA: So you’re always consulting her as you’re working through a piece?

SO: Right, especially colors. Ruthie, my assistant, who actually went to RISD for furniture, too, has been working with me for over four years, and she’s really good with colors, too. I’m making a store piece for Braindead, and there are eight drawers where I have to pick different colors. I usually pick a base color, and then ask Ruthie to pick 10 more colors to go with it. She picks some, and I help select them. I can see colors, just not well. So Ruthie will help pick a broad range of colors, and from there, I narrow the selection down. I also ask Kristen, my wife. So Ruthie and Kristen both help me to pick colors.

SA: That’s really interesting because I think a lot of your work is invested in color and composition, and when I read that you are color blind I was surprised because you’re so good with color. I know there are people around you, helping you make these decisions, but I’m wondering how your experience seeing color differently has impacted you?

SO: Well, I didn’t use any color for the first half of my career, about five years. I didn’t want to use colors because I was afraid. All I did was apply an oil finish or clear coat to plywood.

SA: Well, you still see color, but you were afraid of using color the “wrong way” on a piece?

SO: Yeah, exactly, I was worried I could make a piece look gross. So yeah, Ruthie and Kristen pick some colors. For example, I asked Ruthie to pick colors for eight drawer faces. I pick the base color, she picks the other ten, and then I pull two colors out. Stuff like that.

SA: Very cool. I was super curious about that process, and appreciate you telling me more about how you navigate color in your work. Some other questions I have for you are more interested in your guiding philosophies when you’re making work. There’s a quote of yours that I really like, where you say something along the lines of “I design what I can make,” and I really like the honest “no frills” attitude. You’re building what you can with a sense of authenticity and honesty. I’m wondering if you sometimes have ideas for things that you can’t make in your studio? Things that you might not be able to fabricate?
SO: I have many pieces like that, but I always want to be able to make the pieces in my shop. I want to have my hands on it. So it’s about craft. We make simple stuff, and I want it to be as tight as possible, with careful attention to detail. Otherwise, it’s cheap. So that’s why I design what I can make, because I want my objects to be things that we can make well. We want to make the good stuff. I mean, I have an appreciation for things that are very well-made. Maybe the design isn’t great, but I have an appreciation for things that are well-made. So I want my pieces to be well-made and also good designs, you know?

SA: Yeah.

SO: I’m coming from a background in fabrication. That’s my authenticity. I don’t want to just be a designer, you know. I want to be honest and authentic.

SA: I think that’s an important element of making. That conversation around craft is something you’re very invested in, when it comes to making highly functional and well-built objects, and it feels like a refreshing approach in a lot of ways. This may be a little off topic, but I’m wondering how your time in Los Angeles has influenced you, and your approach to making, if at all?

SO: Just the atmosphere is good, compared to New York which is super competitive and intense. Here, things are a little more relaxed, but there are still so many creative people. Good weather, too, which you can’t beat. And just a little more freedom, I think.

SA: I feel that, too. I think there is a sense of freedom. I spent the summer in New York and I loved it, but I think there’s a sort of lightness when I go back to the West Coast, things feel less burdened. And it is a hub of really talented and creative people at the same time.

SO: Yeah, I think historically, you can come here and make whatever you want. Nobody really cares. Yeah, it’s a feeling of freedom, for sure.

SA: Cool, well those are most of my questions. I want to thank you so much, Shin, for getting back to me.

SO: Yes, come by when you’re in town. We’re in Atwater.

SA: Yeah, I would love to swing by when I graduate. I’ll be back in town then. Hope the rest of your day in the studio is nice out there in Los Angeles.
Get Not High, Get Not Low

I have a fondness for industrial objects. They tend to be interpreted as cold and impersonal, but there is a simple beauty in industrial forms, often developing out of necessity and circumstance. The occasionally misguided but sincere pursuit of utility can sometimes generate surprising solutions and take shape in unexpected and charming ways.

There is a persistent myth that can be traced back to the industrial era; a kind of platitude that suggests machines brought about the debasement of craft and artistry. In “Objects of Desire,” Adrian Forty traces the origins of this sentiment to the early 19th century, when Victorian architects and makers would argue “[...] the attempt to supersede the work of the mind and hand by mechanical process for the sake of economy will always have the effect of degrading and ultimately ruining art,” (41). This notion is further solidified by Varnedoe and Gopnik in “High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture,” when they claim “In the Arts and Crafts Movement [...] art conceived and wrought by the dedicated individual was seen as a saving holdout against the debasements of mechanical production,” (35). Machinery and art can never mix, is the assumption here, else the integrity of the work will be compromised. Although dated and tired, I believe this is an idea that persists.

It’s a difficult stance to argue against, even now–the notion that honest, soulful objects and furniture have been degraded by industrial fabrication. Today, there seems to be a collective desire to return to the days before mass production, a shared craving for rituals and objects that carry the trace of the human hand and the evidence of labor. Marks that can’t be reproduced, a clear (and sometimes dogmatic) reverence regarding the “honest” presentation of material, such that the unique “One-Off” will forever be equated with real beauty and art.

It is true, craft (what I refer to as the “One-Off”) is beautiful. Hand-work will always be necessary, as there is an inherent elegance and idiosyncratic quality to work that is rooted in preserving traditional modes of making. It will always be worth fighting for the continued existence of craftsmanship, knowing that a machine can never approximate the human touch and the specificity of the individual. We can always learn from material, and material will always teach us something new.

As I hope to make clear, my intention in writing this is not to disparage or discredit the craftsperson, as I have a sincere love for craft objects. I only want to argue that there is beauty in the industrial object, too. I’ve always
had an appreciation for commonplace, replicable things where the designer is not so important (and maybe even anonymous). I’m speaking about the objects we take for granted because of their seemingly banal quality. Since I can remember, I’ve quietly believed that industrial objects can be humanist at heart. There is sincere love, and perhaps a naive optimism embedded in “The Multiple”: the idea that reproducibility offers a wider network of accessibility that the “One-Off” often rejects in favor of the gallery space and the wealthy elite. However, this isn’t true, as both are caught in the web of the market, and neither the “One-Off” nor “The Multiple” are innocent or avoid problematization.

I write this down in an effort to situate my own work. Where does it sit in this spectrum between Industry and Craft, between the “One Off” and the “Multiple,” between art and commercial object?

Maybe the distinction between craft and industry is more blurred than we think. Binaries tend to be false, and I often believe two opposing forces mirror each other in unique and surprising ways. Or at the very least, they should continuously be mixed with each other.

In “Thinking Through Craft,” Glenn Adamson argues “craft” itself has also occupied a relatively “inferior” position in relation to modern art. Adamson claims that modern arts exists autonomously, focusing on optical effect, whereas “craft” work becomes a supplemental form of interior decoration, focusing on material experience. Moreover, “craft” objects, including weavings, upholstery, etc have historically been coded “feminine,” and devalued in a patriarchal society that deems this work amateur (Adamson, 5). The representation (or lack of representation) regarding Anni Albers’ work is perhaps most evident of this kind of erasure, and the devaluing of coded feminine craft. A 2006 exhibition at the TATE Modern in London paired her work with her husband Josef Albers and László Moholy-Nagy. Yet, the exhibition failed to mention her name entirely, and actively erased her work from the text.

Although frequently positioned as polar opposites, it seems both craft and industry have been relegated as inferior to the arts, and this is perhaps what I find most interesting and exciting about their possible combination.

The objects I produce are deceptive in the way that they seek to emulate industry, while requiring the involvement of hours of personal labor, hand work, and material experimentation. I spend quality time trying to hide the fact that I used my hands to make the object, seeking a resolved, pristine finish that disguises my approach. Although the materials I often work with
are not associated with “craft,” I believe they involve their own forms of material knowledge and manipulation that suggest the work ethic of a craftsperson. I am decidedly not a craftsperson, but I aspire to make work with a strong knowledge of material possibilities, even if the materials are not typically considered in high esteem.

I try to approach my work through the eyes of a craftsperson, interested in playing with commercial and industrial materials as a means of pushing ideas of taste and beauty. My ultimate aim in doing this is to blur distinctions between other false cultural dichotomies, including avant, minimalist art objects with “low,” ornamental, populist objects. An obsession with “good taste” was always a bore in my opinion. My sincere goal here is to make furniture that is at once utilitarian—pulling from craft and industrial design—and also worthy of being read as an art object. I attempt to do this by mixing elements of “high” and “low” styles, sometimes appropriating or collaging elements of pieces revered for a sense of “high” aesthetics with commercial, or “low” material.

Part of this desire to mix styles is located in a history of California art, where the distinction between Pop and Minimalism collapsed during the 1960s. While there was quite a strong distinction between the two movements on the East Coast (with Judd, Andre, and Smithson leading the minimalists and Warhol and Lichtenstein opting for figurative and provocative pop), contemporaneous artists on the West Coast were seamlessly blending the two styles. This is further articulated in “Pacific Standard Time”: “[...] while the consumer-oriented subject matter of pop and the abstracted formalism of Finish Fetish or even minimalism might seem poles apart, several points of similarity emerged in the context of Los Angeles art: both pop and Finish Fetish emphasized surface, utilized technologies tied to industrial or consumer culture, combined handcrafting with industrial fabrication, mixed painterly aspects with sculptural ones, and integrated representational modes with abstract ones,” (126). This was a time when attempts at distinctions were much more ambiguous, such that the work made during this period can sometimes be difficult to place, art historically speaking. Things that seem diametrically opposed, were in fact mixing and melting, troubling difference. The authors of “Pacific Standard Time” go on to say, “The critical distinctions between styles—most notably between pop and minimalism—did not ring as true in California as they did in New York: in their East Coast expressions, these styles were regarded as polar opposites, while on the West Coast they seemed to be expressions along a continuum,” (128).

The Ferus gallery in Los Angeles represented many of the artists associated with this style of work, and offers one point of reference for my
inspirations. Although I am skeptical of many of the artists that emerged from the Ferus Gallery, and the macho attitudes surrounding the development of the work as well as potential nostalgic attitudes regarding previous art movements, I do think many of the artists frequently associated with the school are not discussed in art historical terms because the work was considered superficial or vain, while some of the work is worth revisiting.

This was a particularly interesting time in the development of art history, and provides a clear example of work that lies in the mysterious space between modernism and postmodernism. The objects that emerged from the Ferus Gallery and art from Los Angeles in the 1960s feel at once contemporary and primordial, and generate a reflective, meditative stance in the viewer. Although there is no unified approach to art-making coming out of Los Angeles, my work re-visits these styles and modes of making as a means of making sense of where I’m from, my exposure to industrial and commercial environments growing up, sifting through the past or trying to find a history, and thinking about ways it can or might be re-articulated for a deeper understanding of the present moment.

In writing this essay, it seems a lot of my interest in making is rooted in finding the space between two dialectically opposed things. What happens when you are excited and inspired by craft objects and industrial objects, minimalism as well as maximalism, modernism and post-modernism, the past and the present? I find this to be a productive space to work today, seeking to mix unlikely things. I can only hope to make work that successfully muddles those distinctions.
“I Could Eat Color” (An Interview with Gere Kavanaugh)

G: Spenser Atlas!

S: Hi, is this Gere?

G: Where are you? Are you back in Rhode Island?

S: I am in Rhode Island, have you ever been to Providence before?

G: Yes, a very long time ago. There used to be a porcelain place in Rhode Island.

S: Oh interesting, you were going to make porcelain-ware? Yeah, I am sorry I’m back in Providence. I really wish I could have visited you in Los Angeles. I don’t want to take up too much of your time today, either.

G: No, that’s ok, it’s Saturday. The thing is, I’m only less than half a mile from Atwater.

S: Ha. Well, when I emailed you, I was spending time with my family in Eagle Rock.

G: Well, Los Angeles is so big, we know it in sections. Eagle Rock is easy for me to get to. And Eagle Rock is less than ten minutes away.

S: I was worried about interrupting your days while I was visiting Los Angeles. I assume you are very busy, so I didn’t want to be a bother.

G: No, it’s ok. I was flattered that I got a call from you. I was also contacted by a former Cranbrook student recently, and he found out that I was a female designer. He didn’t know of any female designers, and I thought, “Oh my god.”

S: This was recently?

G: Yes, this is a student that went to Cranbrook after me. He was very successful in furniture design. He lives in Minneapolis now. And he did something so nice, Spenser. He put money for a scholarship in my name at Cranbrook, because Cranbrook had no scholarships for women in design.

S: So this is a scholarship that is available for women at Cranbrook right now?
Fold Lamps
Powder Coated Steel, Acrylic Diffuser, Cloth Cord, Magnets
G: No, what it is, Spenser, and I hate to be such a harpy, is that people rarely investigate. And they don’t encourage. But he found that there were no scholarships for women in the design department at Cranbrook. So he created the scholarship and called it the Gere Kavanaugh scholarship.

S: That’s amazing. That’s really exciting.

G: Well, it’s amazing to me, Spenser. And when my book came out, “A Colorful Life,” I got calls and emails from Sweden, Spain, Italy, and Auckland Islands.

S: Wow, is this the first time you have received contact internationally?

G: Yes, because the book was sold in museums around the world.

S: Yeah, that was actually the first time I personally encountered some of your work as well, through the monograph published by Louise Sandhaus and Kate Catmur.

G: Well, I’ve been a harpy enough. Let me ask you, what are you curious about? Just tell me, and just be very open.

S: Well, I’m studying furniture design at RISD right now, and I have actually been reaching out and interviewing a few artists and designers that have inspired me that are largely located in California. I thought that you would be a really amazing person to speak to, as I want to learn more about your journey to become a designer, particularly about your time at Cranbrook.

G: Cranbrook changed my life.

S: It did?

G: Yes, because Cranbrook said “you can do anything.”

S: And you did everything! I was looking at your thesis work, actually, and noticed that you ended up developing a chair, some textiles, a table, lighting, jewelry, and toys, is that right?

G: Yes.

S: I’m in the process of working through my thesis right now, and I was curious to
S (continued): know more about how you made some of the decisions that went into your thesis at Cranbrook.

G: Well, first of all, let me tell you a bit of background. I did undergraduate work in Memphis, Tennessee at the Memphis Academy of Arts. I really started out though, when I was about eight years old. My father took me to the city for a Junior Saturday School for the Arts. The words he said to me after registration were “I don’t expect you to do anything with this, but I do hope your life will be enriched.” That was sort of tattooed in my brain. So I went every Saturday and I got good encouragement. Then I got my BA in Memphis. And I had a teacher who went to Cranbrook. I then put my portfolio together and sent it to Cranbrook, and I got accepted. And the thing about getting accepted was this: The director of Cranbrook only took about 125 students, period, and there were no classes.

Students were required, and are still required, to enroll in “studios”—design, painting, sculpture, all of that—and each student was required to visit every studio at least once a week to find out what was going on. People continually ask me what “classes did you have?” We didn’t have classes!

S: Haha. No Rules.

G: No classes at Cranbrook. And when you got there, they would say, “If you don’t know why you’re here, how you got here, and what you want to do, please leave by tomorrow afternoon.” That still exists.

S: Yeah, did they have their 3D program when you attended?

G: No, there were no programs. This is what’s wrong with this country. I’m not kidding. They are too niche.

S: That structure, or lack of structure really, seems to have inspired so much of your work, as your practice is very multidisciplinary. You work moves between so many different kinds of media. Do you think this is partly because of Cranbrook?

G: There were no divisions at Cranbrook. The school gave you a studio and a bedroom. And it was all up to you. But the energy amongst students was very casual as you got to see what they were doing. There were also practicing artists and designers on campus, and they would come and visit us. You would tell them what your problem was, and work out solutions for your project. So whatever it was that you were working on, you got encouragement.
S: And were you inspired by the visiting artists that came to Cranbrook? Were there any in particular?

G: Yes, we had people from Frank Lloyd Wright to Bucky Fuller.

S: Wow, Bucky Fuller visited you?

G: Yes, he visited us, too. He first would visit the Detroit Art Institute, and then he would come out to Cranbrook. And we had two significant females, one was my Maija Grotell, who was in the Ceramics Department. And the other one was Marianne Strengell, who was the head of the Fiber Department. You could go to these teachers, and get their information and advice on what you were doing. Usually, in February, there was a project where an architect, a designer, and a ceramicist worked on the same project.

Secondly, in the Detroit area at that particular time in the 50s, there was the Saarinen office, Minoru Yamasaki’s office, who built and designed the trade center, and there was Victor Gruen, who invented the shopping center. Plus, the Detroit Art Institute. So, there was this mixture of people that you got to interface with. But there was no niche, no niche at all. That’s one of the problems, as I’ve said, with this country. Not only in the field of design, but in the way we think.

S: Yeah, are you talking about narrow-minded or siloed professions? You wish they were more connected or open?

G: Yeah, but anyhow, when I got out of school, I was broke, and I was lucky enough to work for General Motors styling. But it was the architectural arm, and the architectural arm interfaced with the Saarinen office. And because of the size of the community, with Minoru Yamasaki’s office and Victor Gruen, there was this energy to what people were doing. So it couldn’t possibly be a “niche” situation. And my time here in Los Angeles has sort of been that way, too. I’ve been out here since 1960, and I shared space with Frank Gherry and Greg Walsh.

S: So after school, you worked for General Motors, right, and then you worked for Victor Gruen, is that correct?

G: Yes, first for GM as a stylist, then I went to work for Victor Gruen. He invented the shopping center. And as a result, he created so many jobs for people in Southern California.
S: I have so many questions. I wonder if when you’re designing something in mind, do you think of a full immersive space with objects, textiles, and furniture pieces first, or do you start with one piece and build outwards?

G: Usually the former, but it doesn’t make any difference, because with the training at Cranbrook, you got the sense of everything because of the way it was set up. And most good designers think that way anyhow.

S: Yeah, I agree.

G: Actually, the most interesting stuff right now is in the hotel industry.

S: Hmm, that’s really interesting, why do you say that?

G: Well, it’s the lobbies that are always the most inventive.

S: Yeah, do you have any favorite hotels that you’re thinking of?

G: Anything I can get my hands on.

S: Well, that speaks to your time at Victor Gruen, too, because you designed everything in those spaces, is that correct. And designing a retail space is sort of the ultimate challenge. You’re designing people’s experience walking through the store.

G: Are you familiar with the sculpture artist Ruth Asawa?

S: Yeah!

G: Well I asked her for some of her first commissions.

S: Wow, that’s incredible. Was she living in the Bay Area at the time?

G: Yes, she lived in the Bay, but the funny thing about this, Spenser, is that the first time I ever saw one of her wire hanging sculptures was in Birmingham, Michigan. There were several families that were very nice to the students at Cranbrook. And sometimes, they would invite us over for Sunday afternoon tea. I was invited to a house and I saw one of her first wire sculptures that she ever made, and I didn’t even know that she did this at Black Mountain.

S: Oh, she went to Black Mountain College? I didn’t know that.
G: Yes, Black Mountain. Dig up or steal or get any book you can and read about Black Mountain. Such an interesting group of people came out of there.

S: Yeah, I know it was founded by ex-Bauhaus professors in North Carolina, including Walter Gropius.

G: Yes, you should get the book and read it.

S: I will check it out. But that is amazing, you supported Ruth Asawa when she was getting her feet off the ground as a designer and artist.

G: Well, I came out to California to work for Victor Gruen, and I went up one Thanksgiving to San Francisco and I walked into the De Young museum and saw Ruth’s first museum exhibition. Coincidentally, about six months later, the Gruen office sent me to San Francisco because they were opening a sort of small flagship store in the banking area of San Francisco. Raymond Loewy was supposed to do it and Joseph Magnin didn’t like it. But, Gruen had sent me up for something else, and they liked it, and a couple weeks later they said, “Send that young lady up here.” So, I went up there, and suggested something instead of doing the typical thing that retail areas were doing, like hanging these god awful chandeliers over the cosmetic or jewelry department. I suggested to the client that we not do that, and hang some of Ruth Asawa’s sculptures instead. They thought that was ground-breaking. But I didn’t think that. I thought, “Here’s somebody who lives in San Francisco.” And Joseph Magnin was cutting edge before Barneys was ever even conceived of in New York.

S: Did Joseph Magnin start in California?

G: Yes, they started in California. There was Joseph Magnins and I. Magnins. They were brothers. But anyhow, little did I know that the client had a piece of Ruth’s sculpture. Because one of their kids and one of Ruth’s kids went to school together. And the five sculptures I commissioned are in my book.

S: I remember seeing them in the book as well. I guess this is sort of on the same topic, but in thinking through other people and artists that you worked with, I wanted to know more about your relationship with Sister Corita Kent and Magdalene Mary?

G: Well, I first met Sister Corita Kent and Sister Magdalene Mary when they ran the art department at Immaculate Heart.
G (continued): And they had a little publication called “The Irregular Bulletin.” And the former school I went to in Memphis asked both Magdalene Mary and Corita to do the commencement because they were so cutting edge at that time. Still are. But they’re both dead. And when I came out to California, I met them at a BBQ for the commencement of the graduating class. And I walked on the school-yard, and Mag said to me “You must move out here, you must get a new job, and we have a house for you.” All in one sentence. And it was a house in Silverlake, which is very close to Eagle Rock. That was my introduction to Victor Gruen and also Los Angeles. I became friends with her, and I commissioned her to do a project for me at Joseph Magnin at South Coast Plaza.

S: I’m wondering, did they convince you to move to Los Angeles?

G: I was offered a job before I came out, and I was just visiting to see if I would like it down there. At the same time, the Saarinen office had offered me a job, but as much as I admired the work, there was a set of circumstances that made me realize it was not for me.

S: The Saarinen office was also in Detroit, correct?

G: No, it was out the back road from Cranbrook. There were only 30 architects there. It was amazing. And after the studios at Cranbrook closed, a bunch of us would rendezvous at the BBQ at the Sarineen office to get one last bite before going to bed.

S: Your decision to move to Los Angeles must have been a really big change for you.

G: A big change? Not only that, but you see, I grew up in the South, at that sleepy river town called Memphis.

S: Was Los Angeles less sleepy?

G: Well, it took me a year to find out how the place worked. I thought because the sun was out you had to be outside. But you see, I came out of an area where it rained, and another area where it snowed.

S: And did you naturally love Los Angeles, or were there things that were hard or difficult to adjust to when you moved?
G: No, there was a pull. It was a pattern of life, and also how people viewed things. You see, the East Coast is run by Track Thinking.

S: Track Thinking?

G: Track, as in a railroad. It starts in Boston, and goes down into New York, Philadelphia, and Washington. The South, where I grew up, was all agriculture and lumber. And that’s where William Eggleston was born—he’s the one who made color photography what it is today. He is a very interesting photographer, but he couldn’t leave Memphis, or the South, because his family had seventeen thousand acres in cotton. So what I’m getting at is that it’s a different attitude. Then you jump way over the mountains to the West coast, and it’s a different kind of thinking.

S: How would you describe the thinking on the West Coast?

G: Well, I guess as Neutra’s brother told me at a dinner party, it’s more flexible. And nobody tells you what to do.

S: Yeah, I see that in terms of design work. I see a sort of lightness or quality of lightness in the work that I don’t see in the East Coast.

G: You see, Cranbrook was very instrumental in creating Modern design. Because the Eames’ were at Cranbrook. Florence Knoll was at Cranbrook. All the manufacturing people at the time were in Michigan.

S: I am actually sort of curious to hear more about Cranbrook’s legacy in regards to establishing Modernism as the prevalent style at the time

G: It wasn’t a style. It was a matter of creative thinking, which is different from a style.

S: Yeah, it was a program or mode of living and seeing the world. But in my studies, I’ve encountered many modernist designers that were afraid of color and ornamentation.

G: Yes, you know why? Because none of it is taught in the schools, and it’s a Bauhaus thinking. Not only the Bauhaus, but Adolph Loos, who was a designer before the first World War. And this includes Frank Lloyd Wright—they all had to put something down to make themselves look good.
S: Completely. One of the reasons why I admire your work is because it’s so vibrant and colorful and decorated. I wonder if it was hard to advocate for yourself, when the predominant mode of making was very austere, and afraid of ornamentation and color.

G: Well, I wasn’t, and I had clients that weren’t. Schools still don’t teach color, even Sci-Arc which is one of the leading-edge architectural schools in the country.

S: You’re right, I haven’t really been taught on the subject of color here at RISD.

G: I have collected color since 1970, I have a small library on color.

S: A personal archive? What do you mean you collect color?

G: Well, I collect books on color, and the origins of color.

S: Do you have a working theory of color?

G: No, because each job is different.

S: So you’re responding to what your clients, or the space, or project is demanding of you, and then you come up with a palette and patterns?

G: Color and material all have to speak to each other.

S: Definitely, I’m wondering if you think there’s a wrong way of working with color? I sometimes worry I’m going to use color the wrong way.

G: So you have to figure this out yourself, and don’t say you will use it the wrong way. But it’s a serious subject. A very serious subject.

S: Do you feel like people don’t treat color as a serious subject today or in the past?

G: No, these architects don’t treat it right, because they don’t know a damn thing about it.

S: I think that’s partially why people might be afraid to work with color.

G: No, no. Start painting, and you’ll know color. Collect books. I have quite a number of books. Color has changed the world at different times.
G (continued): It changed with Christopher Columbus.

S: How so?

G: Well, he discovered South America. They found Cochineal, which the people in South America use. It was the most vibrant red. Even Queen Elizabeth licensed pirates to steal, not like the Johnny Depp movie, the Logwood which came from British Honduras. Because the solid core of it was a red, and it was a sable red. Generally, at that time, the world was grey. There was a demand for color.

S: So it was largely grey in the Western world, it seems the rest of the world wasn’t so grey. Another question I have is sort of related to color, but it’s about how being in Los Angeles has influenced some of the things you designed? I know there are a few pieces of yours, like your “Crazy Chairs” and your “Bungalow Chairs” that specifically reference some buildings in LA, but I’m wondering if and how the landscape influences your work?

G: I was knocked out by the landscape when I moved here. Knocked out.

S: Just because it was so beautiful or new?

G: There were mountains that were covered with a blooming cactus as ground cover. And they would be spilling over the mountain. And out here, in April, you must have seen this, the poppies, the fields of poppies are incredible. In fact, they were published in the LA times this week.

S: I remember visiting the poppy blooms with my family when I was an undergraduate student. That is one thing that I truly do miss about California. Just the sheer quantity and variety of flowers that I see whenever I go back. It’s not like anything I’ve seen anywhere else, but it’s something that when I look at your work, I’m reminded of.

G: Spenser, you have to be a sleuth yourself to find information on color. Start your own clippings and find out the sources.

S: I do want to start building an archive of information and ideas as I’m making pieces.

G: It’s fun when you get into it.
S: Yeah, it’s like a map of your brain.

G: No, it’s your eyes! You’ve got to train your eyes to look. Why weren’t you taught color at RISD? Do you ever find out what’s going on in other departments or studios?

S: Yeah, I got to work with some textiles students recently, and they take classes on color, color theory, and texture.

G: Oh, forget color theory. Forget it. It’s just a way to make some sense. But it won’t, because each project carries with it different demands. You have to find out what is required from the work.

S: It does seem like a very intuitive process, choosing color.

G: No, you have to find out the history and why color became important. Color was also part of a nuptial agreement between Portugal and England. Because Portugal was the first country to trade with the East. Catherine of Braganza from Portugal married one of the kings of England and he wanted to trade between England and India.

S: And that influenced the way we engage with color in the states?

G: No, it brought blue, or Indigo specifically, to the West.

S: Do you have a favorite color by chance?

G: No, all of them! It depends on what the project is. I could eat color.

S: Ha, I could take a bite out of color myself. I feel really lucky to be able to speak with you because I personally feel like a lot of design history in California is sort of dismissed or not given as much attention as design work on the East Coast.

G: Yes, do you know why that is? It’s the narrow mindedness of the East Coast.

S: Did they think that CA artists were superficial?

G: No, no, no, the East Coast was superficial.

S: Interesting, I’m inclined to agree with you because I grew up on the West Coast,
S (continued): but you also had a hand in establishing CA as a major player in the world of art and design. You curated two exhibitions on California architecture and design, correct?

G: I’ve done more than two!

Oh, I read somewhere that you curated “Islands in the Land” at the Pasadena Art Museum and there was another exhibition that I wish I saw, called “Home Sweet Home, American Domestic Vernacular Architecture.”

G: Yes, there is a group of historians that have pursued vernacular architecture and I wish I had kept up with it.

S: It sounded like such an amazing exhibition, I wish I could have gone. All this to say, I feel like you helped put California on the map.

G: Well RISD should have me lecture there.

S: Ha, that’s true. I’ll reach out to my professors and say you would like to give a lecture here. I’m sure they would be ecstatic to host you. But thank you so much Gere for speaking with me. I hope to stay in touch, too, as I finish working on my thesis here at school. I really do appreciate being able to talk with you today.

Are you working on anything right now?

G: I’m still going over my archives to send to Cranbrook. I have to do a lot of work on them.

S: Well, good luck with the work, I hope to see the archive myself.

G: One piece of advice. Get smart, that’s all. Get smart in all areas.

S: That is probably the best advice I’ve ever received.
Proposal for "Fold Lamp" Screen
Objects are bundles of relationships. The things we cherish are symbols of connections, most often representing ties to people, places, and ideas. They can also remind us of the past we cling to, or the future we dream of—being either aspirational or grounding, sometimes all at once.

Put simply, everything is referential.

Think of something you own. You love this object, but you don’t know why. Is it the way it looks? That’s not it. It could also be the material quality of the object—wood, metal, ceramic, plastic, paper—there’s an endless selection of surfaces, so why does this object speak to you? No, it’s not just material, it’s not just the look of the thing.

It was probably a gift handed to you by your best friend, or, maybe it was a quilt by your grandmother with printed images of cowboys and the American West. Oh, I know—it’s from one of your favorite designers. You always kept that Alessi pepper grinder in your kitchen, even though you never use it. It could also be a conceptual affinity—you might resonate with what the object and its author are expressing. Maybe the designer is unimportant—it’s a discrete but well-designed piece that has become a constant tool in your life, helping you navigate the world. Even so, the object suggests a worldview that puts you in conversation with others and an approach that dismisses the designer’s ego in favor of an objects’ performance. The point is that the object you care about so deeply either tethers you to someone outside of yourself, or, it is expressive, speaking in a way that resonates with you. Objects are constantly communicating, and as a result, connecting us to others and the world.

Mikhail Bhaktin articulates this idea through the Dialogic Principle, in which he rejects “[...] the idea of the solitary self, believing that consciousness always evolves in the context of others,” (Romney). For Bhaktin, everything is dialogue, and dialogue itself becomes systemic and relational. It might seem contrived to believe that everything is connected. And it may be false—but there is value in realizing nothing exists in a vacuum. For Bhaktin, dialogue and connection are synonymous. Are you an island?

But this is too abstracted—You might be wondering how this relates to objects? In “The Meaning of Things,” Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton conduct a sociological study that further suggests objects are symbols of ideas and relations to others. Beyond enjoyment and self-expression,
they find that one of the main reasons people hold onto objects is a notion of “kinship”; of the ties that bind people to each other—that provide continuity in one’s life and across generations,” (86). Objects, they argue, are abstracted signs signaling the bonds between us.

Things keep us together, and provide a sense of rootedness in the world. Eighty-two percent of people surveyed cherished an object because it reminded them of immediate family members, and 40% said it tied them to non-family members, including “friends,” “associates,” and “heroes,” (85). Nothing is discrete, in that an invisible string runs between us and the things we hold on to, connecting private worlds to those outside of the domestic sphere.

In a very real sense, objects are binding—they bridge gaps and forge ties. They root us to ideas, images, and histories we care about, or to people we love and admire. This may sound like a purely abstracted and self-indulgent exercise, but it’s worthwhile to imagine: Is it possible for objects to speak to this sense of interconnectedness? Of fastening, joining, and bridging? Can the things we live with—objects that help us connect with the world outside ourselves—call attention to the ways in which the things themselves are held together?

Tauba Auerbach, an artist from the Bay Area who is now living and working in New York, points to possible ways in which objects and contemporary art can augment our awareness of this relational quality of living. Their practice often pulls inspiration from the physical sciences, rather than the social sciences, to communicate ideas of relationality. The notion of topology—a mathematical concept that points to how constituent parts are interrelated or arranged (and stay unaffected by distortion)—has become a guiding compass for their practice and worldview: “I slowly started to think about everything in terms of topology: looking at the shape of connections between ideas or people, between stages in a process; looking at where there are holes, inherent restrictions, directionality, different domains or sides. This seems to result in me making a lot of interlocking shapes, like woven canvas and glass, or surfaces that try to hover between dimensions,” (Singer, Fanny). For Auerbach, the transcendental is embedded in the ordinary. Their craft is concerned with revealing, celebrating, and manipulating the structures of the everyday.

My intention in bringing these disparate sources together is to translate ideas of relationality into a mode of object-making, in which the objects I make help me connect with others and abstractly reference ideas of interrelatedness. I tend to make furniture composed of parts and pieces, with clear distinctions between the elements, or modules involved.
For each project, I employ a different method in which these pieces keep together. Some work involves pressure fitting the elements into a steel structure, others include webbing (the highlighted structural component running through tiled, upholstered cushions) as the connecting force that holds the separate parts in unison. Magnets, embedded in sheet metal, join four pieces of a lamp together. Steel hardware connects separate modules of a bookshelf, and holds them in place. The intention here is to create surfaces and seating that allows for people and ideas to meet, and to suggest this “meeting” through their connective structures. Collaboration is a crucial element here as well, as the physical making of the objects, including the shelf and the Jacob’s Ladder, directly involved working with people, or invited collaboration.

On a more intimate level, my initial interest in furniture and domestic objects comes from the sincere desire to make useful and beautiful things for people I love. The notion of “useful” is questionable, as I think most things have a beauty and a use. Furniture, however, provides a frame for the drama of everyday life. I want to make chairs, storage, etc that support us in our routines and create spaces that generously invite connection between people and ideas.

I want to make pieces that suggest connection, with the desire to reveal how we rely on each other to navigate the world. Objects tether us to each other, and root us firmly in space when we start to feel like we’re floating.
To read is to ———

Writing and Graphics
Designed by Lydia Chodosh
*
Furniture & Displays
Designed by Spenser Atlas

Rhode Island School of Design
April 2023
“To read is to _____” was a collaborative installation with Lydia Chodosh (Graphic Design MFA ‘24) which took place in RISD’s Graphic Design Commons space from April 8–15, 2023.

The show featured 10 reading forms designed by Lydia Chodosh, each encapsulating a single definition of reading and expressing a formal writing tool aligned with that definition.

I designed the displays in tandem with the objects—they suggest the form of unfolding books and allow for open engagement and interaction with the objects.
To read or not to read—
To see or not to see—
You equate the search
for answers
as you wander inside.

More to make
yourself at home—
carve out a place
in the space that
you can call your own.

If you find yourself
easily distracted, don’t
worry. The room will
forgive you.

The room, in fact,
feeds on this act of grace.

A reading room
can become
a kind of utopia
if you let it.

Be patient.
Allow your mind
to soften—know that
your imagination
belongs entirely to you.

As we are, so we
are.
We have become
And so, we have
loved being.

Maybe this means
you sit on the floor.
Or perhaps you prefer
to stand.
We absorb light as those who photosynthesize.
Part IV
Acknowledgments

I want to thank my family first and foremost, for supporting me throughout this two-year program. My mom, dad, sister, and grandmother all offered guidance and honest perspectives that kept me rooted when I was occasionally feeling ungrounded. Rachel Atlas also offered a home and family for me in Providence when I first moved to the East Coast.

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I am also incredibly lucky to have met some of the most amazing people here in this program—I don’t know what I would have done without Jesse Groom and Bill Carroll, two of my closest friends here and greatest sources of inspiration. I think it’s fair to say I’ve learned the most from my peers, and I’m excited to see how we all navigate our careers outside of RISD.

Finally, I would like to thank Jim Isermann, Shin Okuda, and Gere Kavanaugh for their generosity and willingness to speak with me about their work and process.

Through the various forms of support I received from friends and family, as well as the strength and determination I gained from the program, I have developed a stronger sense of faith in my ideas and my design process.
A Brief List of Thoughts That Can Be Re-Arranged


Get Not High, Get Not Low


Cited

*Keep Together*


