

Apparatus Projects

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Dancing lessons

If buildings were living, what would they remember of their animal tenants? Could a floor tell the difference between a rehearsal and the real thing? And if we said that the walls had ears, would a sales pitch have the same cadence as a love song? When we talk about a building, often we're referencing a fixed point in space, but buildings are mutable, or can be. They rise and fall just like our voices when we're trying to whisper. John Knight's *Secrets*, a work that requires a gallery to remove all its doors, puts a building and its insides into a state of flux. You can't open an exhibition if the exhibition is just already always open. And you might not be able to delineate, exactly, the boundary of where the exhibition starts and the hallway begins. Is a secret still a secret if it's not spoken about behind closed doors? *Libby Rothfeld and John Knight at Apparatus Projects*, the aptly named exhibition in question, plays these same kinds of tongue-in-cheek language games with seemingly declarative words and concepts—refusing stability, even in a straightforward title which, despite telling us who and where we're talking about, holds its secrets close to the chest.

Rothfeld's sculptures manufacture a similar kind of verbal confusion. The artist presents two series of sculptures, both realized through iterative material changes. In the larger series, plaid fabric, transparent plastic, and beaded metal curtain pulls are intercepted by doll wigs and tape; in the other, machine-like sketches on top of epoxy clay, wood, and resin frame tiny inkjet prints of jumbo jets. Rothfeld's naming conventions for these projects differ: in the latter series, the artist refers to these works as "variations," but in the former, each plaid and plastic object is bestowed with a discrete title. These titles resemble the kinds of quixotic appellations spit out by internet generators that tell you what your name would be if you were one of Santa's elves, crossed with the brand names of perfumes you can buy at a drugstore: playful, menacing, anonymous. Within Rothfeld's material and textual manipulations, a poetic narrative of improvisational construction - working with what you have towards some kind of tactile liberation (even if all you have is just your ugly blinds) emerges. Rothfeld's objects began their lives as combinations of mass-produced goods and dingy commercial cast-offs. But now, by playing out a stuttering process of

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transubstantiation, they might be *trying* to be something other than what they are, though the word to aptly describe them hasn't been invented yet.

Likewise, Knight's second contribution to the exhibition, *Big Flip Out*, pushes up against the language that we use to describe a transformation. A floor made from discarded plywood, *Big Flip Out* obscures the entirety of Apparatus Projects' original flooring. Knight's salvaged materials locate *Big Flip Out* within a family of other architectural surfaces borne from desire and deprivation: makeshift skateboard ramps, rickety stages at basement punk shows, construction sites. Like these, *Big Flip Out* absorbs the footfalls of momentarily engaged bodies, providing an ephemeral foundation for something else that was never meant to last. Here, the plywood retains some of the directional markings of its original purpose, which might have been to help build a building. Knight reassembles these directions so that visitors to the exhibition could choose to follow them in an aimless, lyrical waltz. Both Knight and Rothfeld told me that they wanted to make a show anchored in joy. Their shared definition of joy, if they have one, might be that joy is a fugitive sensation, mutable as buildings, slippery as words, elusive until it's not.