

**STRANGE
OSCILLATIONS
AND
VIBRATIONS
OF SYMPATHY**



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Stephanie Brooks, *Sylvia Plath’s Underlinings in Virginia Woolf’s “The Waves,”* 2009. Etched zinc, enamel, and wood. 8.5 x 12 x 2 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago. Photo credit: Kendra Paitz.

LEST I FALL OFF THE EDGE OF THE WORLD INTO NOTHINGNESS

by Kendra Paitz

HOW CAN WE ENSURE that voices are not lost in a void, but instead continue to shout, echo, and resonate? And how can we preserve and amplify the critical perspectives of women writers across generations? Although it would be impossible to tackle this topic in its entirety, *Strange Oscillations and Vibrations of Sympathy*, which features works by women artists that acknowledge or reference women writers, offers one option among myriad possibilities. The exhibition’s title was derived from a sentence Sylvia Plath underlined in her copy of Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*, and that Stephanie Brooks later appropriated for a text-based artwork. These layers of influence and mediation are integral to the thirty-four works in the exhibition, made by twenty-one artists inspired by the writers Octavia Butler, A. S. Byatt, María Elena Cruz Varela, Emily Dickinson, Zora Neale Hurston, Clarice Lispector, Gabriela Mistral, Toni Morrison, Alejandra Pizarnik, Sylvia Plath, Mary Shelley, Rebecca Solnit, Gertrude Stein, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Virginia Woolf. As a tribute to Woolf’s foundational essay “A Room of One’s Own,” which argues that women need their own political and physical space to produce creative works, all the artists selected for the exhibition are women, allowing for a focus on the interpretation of literature through the lenses of subsequent generations of artists. The works in the exhibition demonstrate the political and creative progress of feminism, examine writers’ intellectual pursuits, navigate their status as literary icons, and interpret their legacies. They also engender an intimate and sustained contemplation of texts—a cerebral, analytical pursuit whose future is threatened by a culture that favors sound bites, hashtags, and 140-character tweets.¹

Strange Oscillations and Vibrations of Sympathy is, perhaps, a rather unwieldy exhibition title, but it serves as a poetic and open-ended entry point. The phrase also beautifully speaks

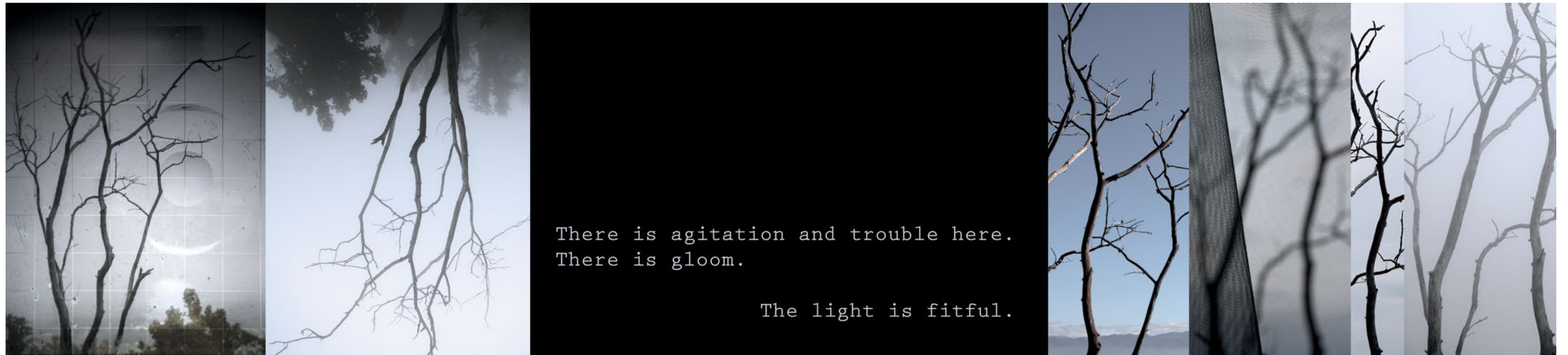
to the idea of reverberations, of influences and impacts that resonate beyond an initial gesture. As previously mentioned, it was derived from **Stephanie Brooks’ *Sylvia Plath’s Underlinings in Virginia Woolf’s “The Waves”*** (2009), which merges the voices of two writers and an artist: Woolf, Plath, Brooks. While researching American author Sylvia Plath’s (1932–1963) archives at Smith College, Brooks discovered that Plath had underlined passages in her personal copies of Woolf’s *The Waves*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *The Years*. The importance of Woolf’s writing to Plath cannot be underestimated; she wrote about Woolf in her diaries numerous times, even documenting a day that she purchased several of her books. On July 20, 1957: “Virginia Woolf helps. Her novels make mine possible...”² And on March 1, 1958, while describing her struggles with writing a particular chapter, Plath asks, “How does Woolf do it? ... I cannot & must not copy either. God knows what tone I shall strike. Close to a prose-poem of balanced, cadenced words and meanings...”³

Reading English author and feminist Woolf (1882–1941) through Plath’s eyes prompted Brooks—whose clever and often humorous work has addressed poetic and literary forms via abstraction—to create her minimal text-based sculptures, which echo the spread of an open book and feature the words that Plath underlined against otherwise blank “pages.”⁴ In Woolf’s experimental 1931 novel, *The Waves*, Plath underlined:

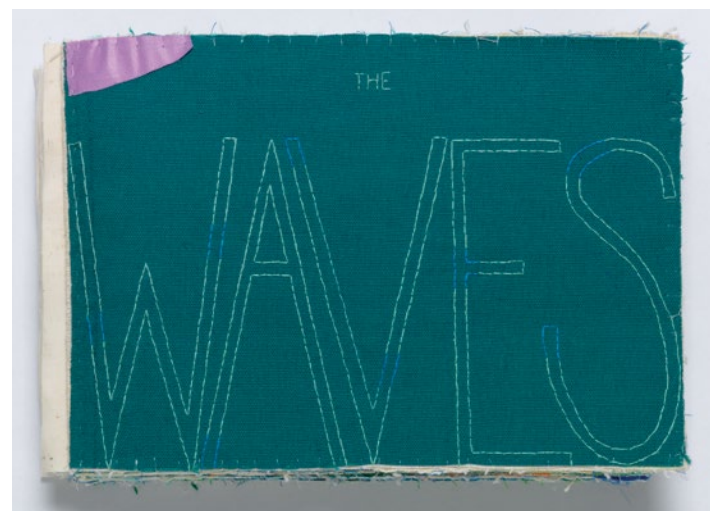
Am I not, as I walk, trembling with strange oscillations and vibrations of sympathy, which unmoored as I am from a private being, bid me embrace these engrossed flocks; these starers and trippers; these errand-boys and furtive and fugitive girls, who ignoring their doom, look in at shop-windows. But I am aware of our ephemeral passage.⁵

ARTISTS

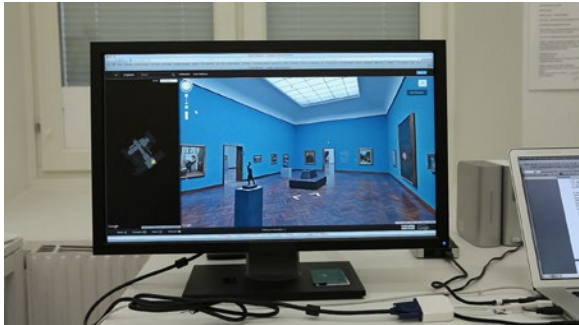
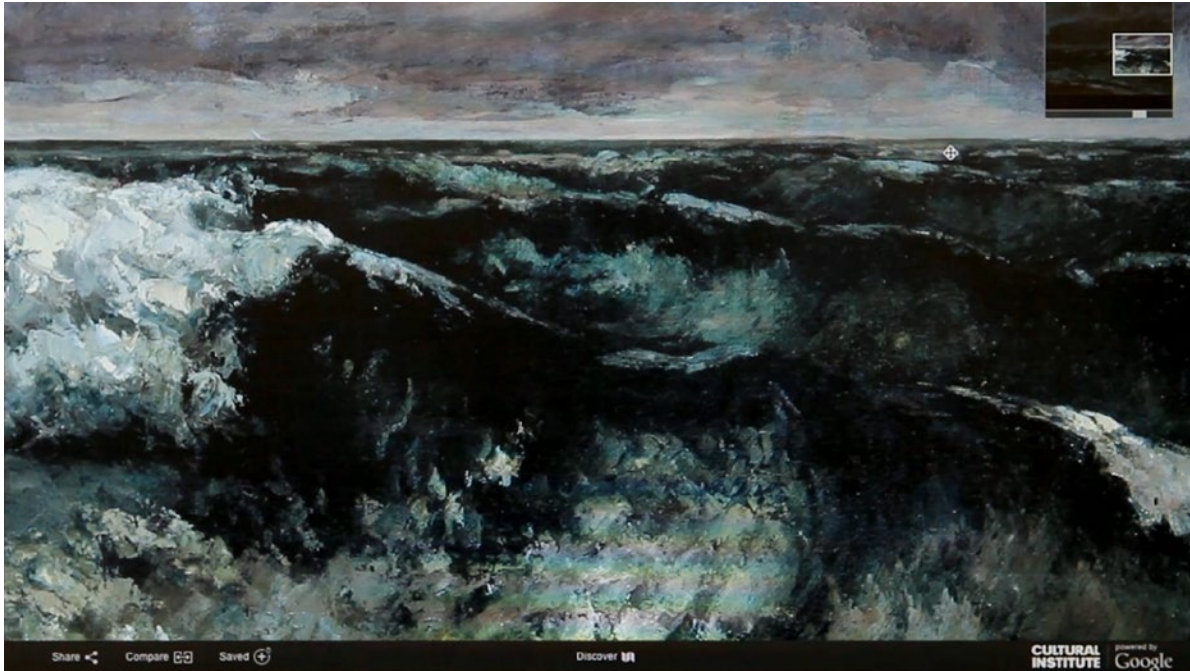
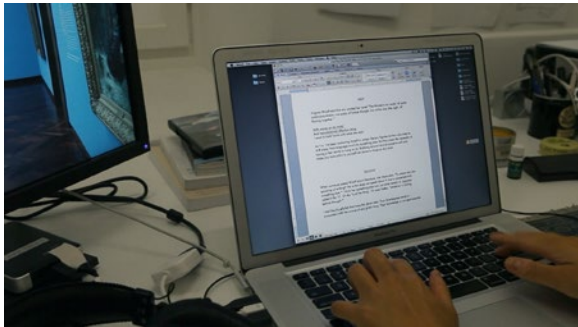
52-55	Jen Bervin
40-45	Stephanie Brooks
47	Anne Collier
57	Bethany Collins
50-51	Moyra Davey
48-49	Marcelline Delbecq
58-69	Abigail DeVille
73	Eve Fowler
36-37	Dianna Frid
68-69	Coco Fusco
75	Sabina Ott
76-77	Melissa Pokorny
34-35	Dawn Roe
33	Kay Rosen
62-63	Carrie Schneider
64-65	Xaviera Simmons
38-39, 70-71	Lisa Tan
67	Cecilia Vicuña
61	Catherine Wagner
83	Carrie Mae Weems
79-81	Deborah Willis



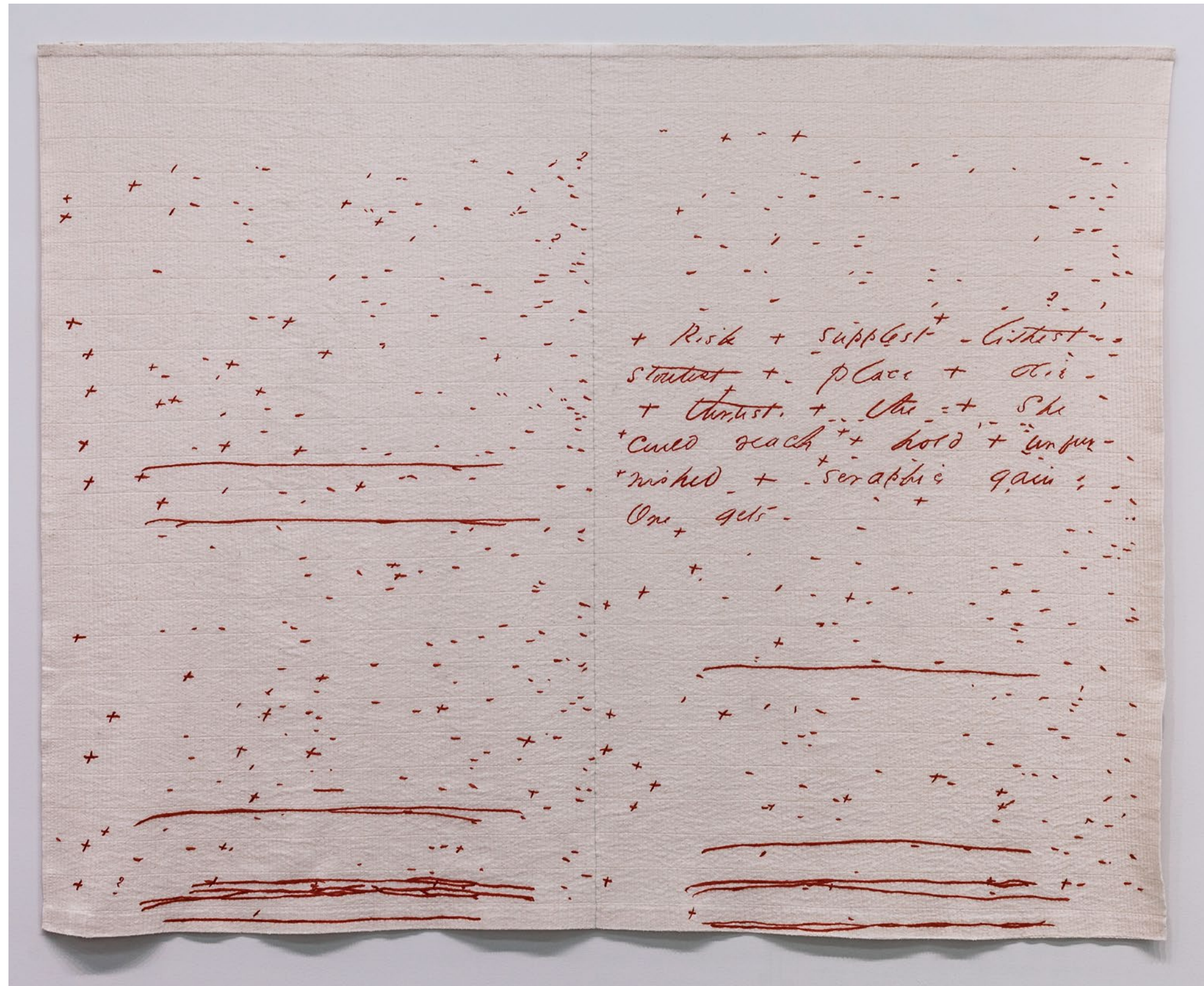
Dawn Roe, *The Sunshine Bores* | *The Daylights*, 2016. Single-channel
HD video with sound, 5:44 minutes.
Courtesy of the artist. For accompanying
information, see page 132.



Dianna Frid, *The Waves*, 2011. Canvas, cloth, embroidery floss, adhesives, paper, acrylic, paint, and cellophane. 7.5 x 21.5 inches (open). Courtesy of the artist.



Lisa Tan, *Waves*, 2014-2015. Single-channel HD video with sound, 19:12 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and Galleri Riis, Stockholm and Oslo. For additional production information, see pages 132-133.

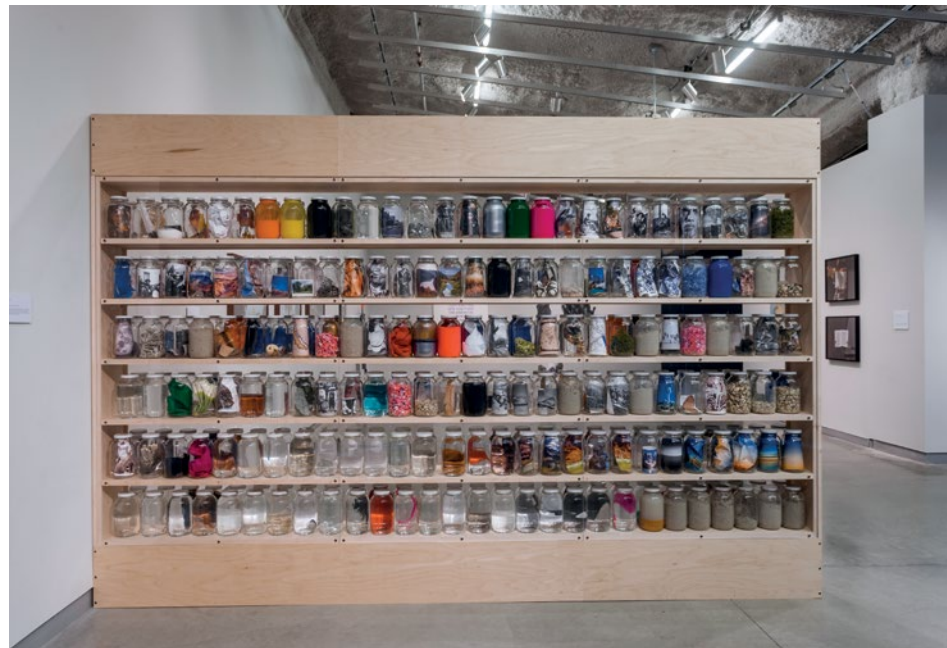
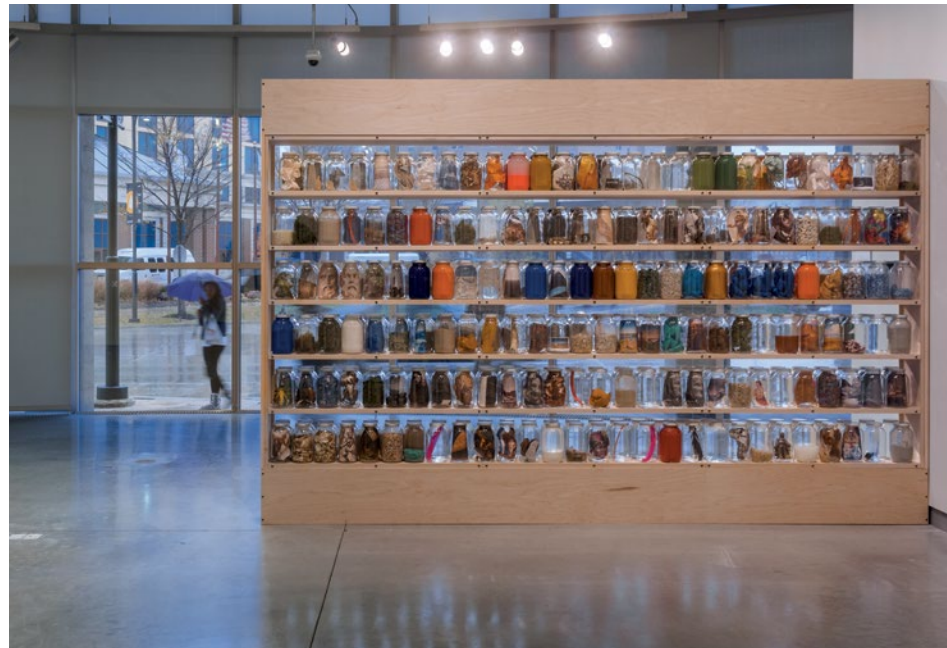


Jen Bervin, *The Dickinson Composites Series, Fascicle 28*, 2008. Cotton and silk thread on cotton batting backed with muslin. 72 x 96 inches. Courtesy of the artist. Photo credit: Juan Fernandez.



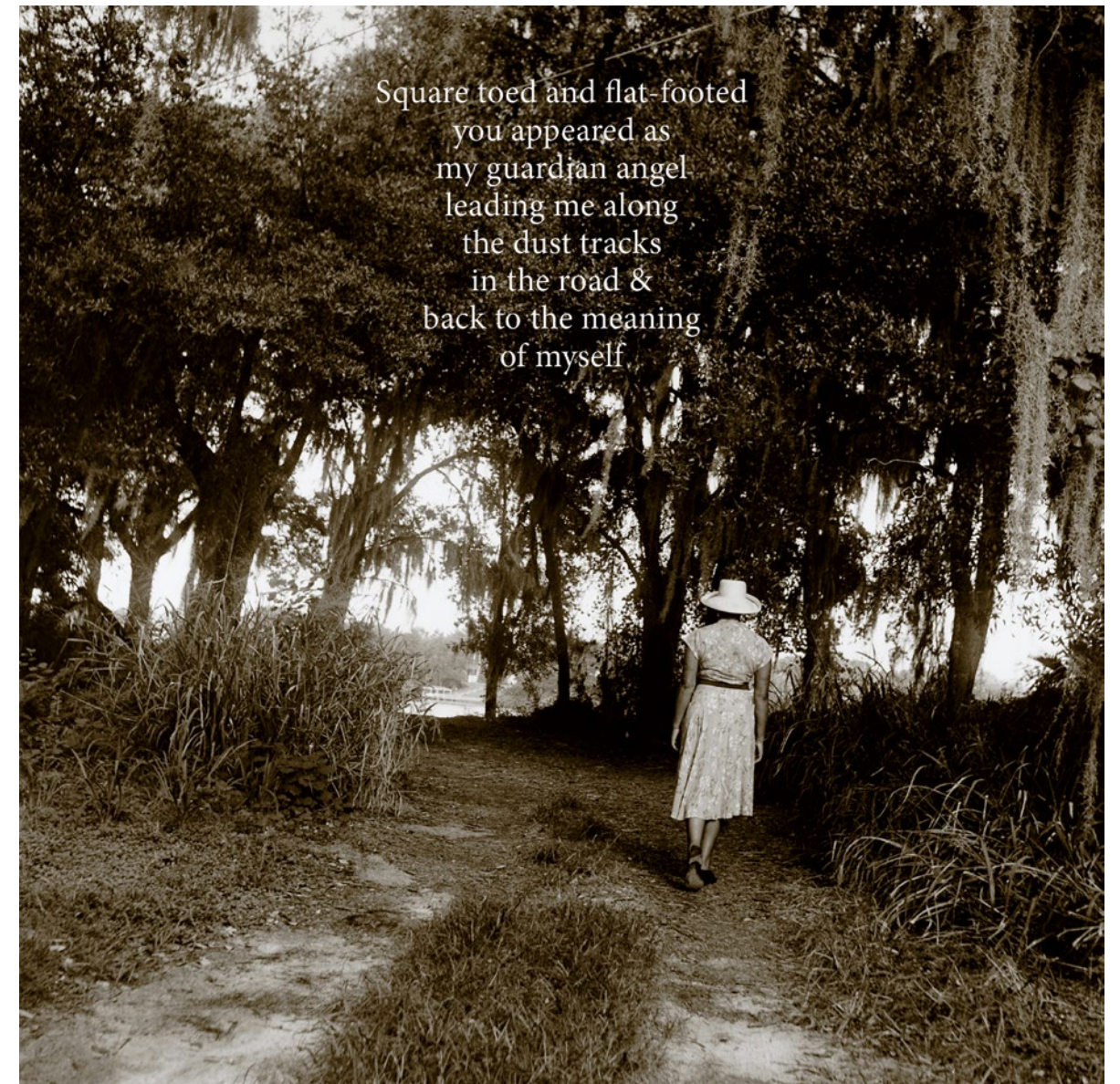
Abigail DeVille, *Kindred, The Ties That Bind*, 2016.
 Reclaimed doors, sheetrock, 2 x 4s, Colonial Red
 paint, Apple Red paint, corn stalks, work
 lights, party lights, gourds, Ivory soap, and red corn.
 Commissioned for *Strange Oscillations and
 Vibrations of Sympathy*. Courtesy of the artist.
 Photo credit: Juan Fernandez.





Xaviera Simmons, *Blue*, 2016. Mixed media. 96 x 144 x 12 inches.
Commissioned for *Strange Oscillations and Vibrations of Sympathy*. Courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery, Miami. Photo credit: Juan Fernandez.





Carrie Mae Weems, *Untitled (Square Toed and Flat Footed)*, 2003. Pigmented inkjet print.
18 x 18 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



"I AM GOING TO EATONVILLE": MEMORY AND REFLECTION PHOTOGRAPHS BY DEBORAH WILLIS

by Deborah Willis and Cheryl Finley

I used to climb to the top of one of the huge chinaberry trees, which guarded our front gate, and look out over the world. The most interesting thing that I saw was the horizon. It grew upon me that I ought to walk out to the horizon and see what the end of the world was like.
– Zora Neale Hurston

I've got the map of Florida on my tongue.
– Zora Neale Hurston

I Am Going to Eatonville: Memory and Reflection examines and interprets the cultural life of Eatonville, Florida, through contemporary images and historical reflection. This essay is a collaboration of sorts; it includes my memories of photographing in Eatonville and art historian Cheryl Finley's reflections on the photographs I made in that special town. This text reconstructs and connects the writer, the town, and me, the photographer.

Zora Neale Hurston's Eatonville is known for many things. It is charged full of history. Eatonville, one of the first all-black towns to be formed after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, was incorporated on August 15, 1887. It symbolized the prospect of social and cultural mobility in the years just after Emancipation. Hurston spent her formative years in the small town observing, writing, and creating visual stories. She often made references to her hometown as she recalled the sights, sounds, and activities that encouraged her artistic pursuits. Her frequent homages to the town gave it an allure

that attracted creative and scholarly attention. Many believe that Eatonville is enriched by its history as a black incorporated town and the cultural legacy that Zora Neale Hurston left in depicting its beauty and family memories in her numerous writings. In my view, Eatonville's history is memorable because of its culture and the images conjured and imagined by the notion of the "chinaberry trees."

Remembered as anthropologist, folklorist, and writer, Zora Neale Hurston was born on January 7, 1891, in Notasulga, Alabama, and died on January 28, 1960, in Fort Pierce, Florida. She grew up in Eatonville and frequently wrote about life in and around the town. Eatonville, with its population of about 2,200 people, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, is approximately twenty miles from Orlando, a city that boasts recreational tourism, one of the state's main economic engines. Eatonville's contribution to this nation—and its great writer, who was particularly well-known during the Harlem Renaissance—is today eclipsed by nearby amusement destinations such as Disney World and Universal Studios.

The history of black towns is grounded in community pride and self-governance. More than fifty black towns were established in the United States during the Reconstruction Era. They provided opportunities for economic advancement and social uplift and were often seen as protective havens by their residents. Many of these towns were, and are, unknown to the larger American society, but others have achieved some distinction. These include: Boley, Oklahoma; Institute, West Virginia; Mound Bayou, Mississippi; Grambling, Louisiana; Nicodemus, Kansas; and Allensworth, California. Each town had a unique beginning. For example, Allen Allensworth, who was born into slavery in Kentucky

Deborah Willis, *Carrie in EuroSalon, Eatonville, Florida*, 2004. Archival inkjet print, 20 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Material Life, New Orleans.



APPENDIX A: EVENTS

During *Strange Oscillations and Vibrations of Sympathy*, we utilized the wealth of campus resources to develop programming—including artist lectures, performances, curator-led tours, K-12 field trips, blackout poetry workshops, a mini-artist residency, a satellite screening, a temporary library, and a three-day symposium—that encouraged further dialogue about the authors’ literary influence and groundbreaking gender roles, as well as a visual approach to interpreting literature.

Opening reception: October 25, 2016

Artist lecture by Bethany Collins: October 26

Artist lecture by Jen Bervin: November 9

Oscillations of Genre and Gender Symposium: November 9-12
Co-organized by Melissa Johnson (Associate Professor, Art History and Visual Culture) and Juliet Lynd (Associate Professor, Spanish and Latin American Studies)

Performance by Cecilia Vicuña: November 10

Symposium summary remarks by Dianna Frid: November 12

Screening of Dawn Roe’s *The Sunshine Bores* | *The Daylights* at Milner Library: October 25-December 18

Book display at Milner Library: October 25-December 18
Co-organized by Kathleen Lonbom and Becca Maree

Field trip program for K-12 students (curator led-tours + art-making workshops): October 26-December 18
Workshops co-organized by Keri Leach (Art Education graduate student)

Reading area at University Galleries (featuring dozens of books by and about the featured writers): October 25-December 18



Left to right, top to bottom: Jen Bervin discussing her *The Dickinson Composites*; *Strange Oscillations* reading area at University Galleries; book display at Milner Library in conjunction with screening of Dawn Roe’s video (photo credit: Becca Maree); high school students during a blackout poetry workshop; Senior Curator Kendra Paitz leading a *Strange Oscillations* exhibition tour; Dianna Frid discussing her artist’s book, *The Waves*; Juliet Lynd introducing Cecilia Vicuña’s performance.