



O^x

Bean Gilsdorf / Lisa Jarrett / Jaleesa Johnston / Elizabeth Malaska /
Maya Vivas / Samantha Wall

Time Being

essay by Jordan Amirkhani, Ph.D.

curated by Blake Shell

Oregon
Contemporary

Portland

OX / 001



This book was published in conjunction with *Time Being*, on view at Oregon Contemporary, Portland, Oregon, from 18 June through 08 August 2021. The exhibition featured works by Bean Gilsdorf, Lisa Jarrett, Jaleesa Johnston, Elizabeth Malaska, Maya Vivas, and Samantha Wall, and was curated by Blake Shell.

Stretched, lengthened, squished, time-looped, mediated, frozen, layered, and ever-changing—the figures and bodily parts in this exhibition reflect on humanity’s relationship with time, history, and identity.

All of the artists in this exhibition do something strange with the figure. Somehow they make it weird, whether through exaggerations of scale or the flattening of time and space. Some pieces feel as if they could be moving forward, or backward, at any moment. Other works speak to our relationship with time itself, by reflecting on memories and stories and how we perceive our own histories and identities. Do these things shift continuously, or is there any permanence within our own selves?

As we near an end to the pandemic, as we wrangle our lives back in some ways, we can’t undo the fact of this past year. It remains inside us, inside our physical selves. The unusual experience of feeling un-moored from time and being physically separated from others, combined with mediated forms of communication, has made life feel unreal. We will carry that experience until it dissipates. As with any wound, eventually it will cease to exist, it will be reduced to a scar. In the meantime, we need to reflect, to process, and to feel our way through the final part of this transition. Samantha Wall said, “It just is, until it’s not.” We can sink into despair or take solace, depending on the moment.

Blake Shell

Executive and artistic director
Oregon Contemporary



Bean Gilsdorf / Lisa Jarrett / Jaleesa Johnston / Elizabeth Malaska /
Maya Vivas / Samantha Wall

Time Being

essay by Jordan Amirkhani, Ph.D.

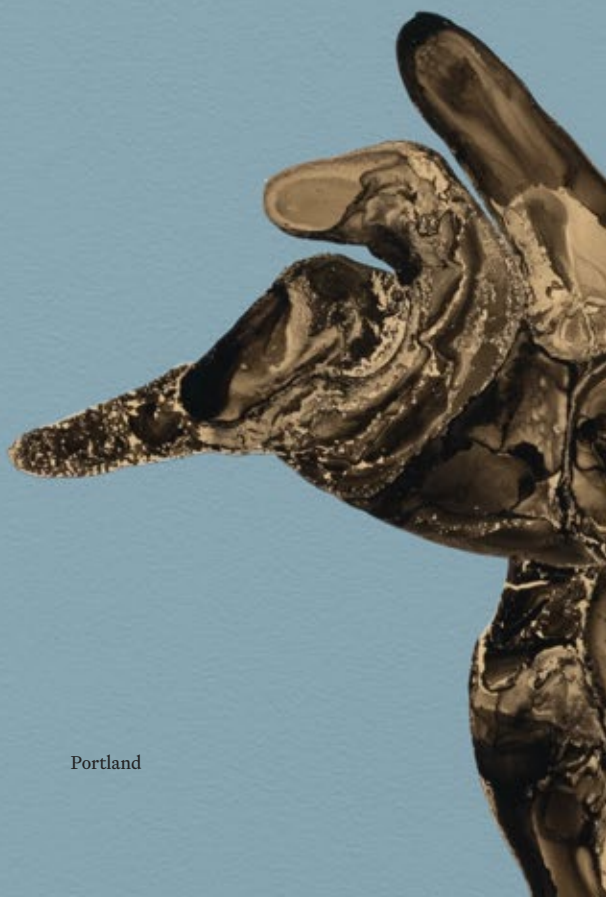
18 Jun–08 Aug 2021

curated by Blake Shell

Oregon
Contemporary

Portland

OX / 001



Time works wonders. When t
will tell. In the nick of time. Lo
ter of time. Time flies. It was a
matter/question of time. The
all times; at no time. A bad tim
time. Old-time. A rare old tim
one's time. On borrowed time
Making time. Making up for l
Run that by me one more time
Once upon a time. The time h
test of time. Stuck in time. By

More Tempo than Timeline

Jordan Amirkhani, Ph. D.

Time is of the essence.
the time is ripe. Only time
osing track of time. Just a mat-
devil of a time. It was just a
y were ahead of their time. At
ne. Downtime. A stitch in
e. A race against time. Biding
e. Buy some time. Doing time.
ost time. Pressed for time.
e. Since the beginning of time.
as come. Withstanding the
the time. For the time being.



Elizabeth Malaska / Fountain(detail) 2021 / 47 x 72 inches / Mixed media

IN THE FOURTH CENTURY, Saint Augustine asked himself, “What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain it to one who asks me, I know not.”¹ Withheld from Augustine’s lament and from the list of idioms and clichés gathered above is that time is never as we wish it to be. Either too fast or too slow, it skips and bends, always in alignment with someone else’s story or needs. Time is, indeed, a kind of failure. An extremely personal duration, time is often unable to encompass the entirety of collective life, even if it is the existential water we swim in, everywhere and always. While clocks and bus schedules, calendars and meetings work to discipline time into something cogent and incremental, all it takes is an international flight, a crazy dream, an experience with drugs or illness to prove how dynamic, individualistic, and embodied time is. Despite our impulse to rule and regulate it, time unfurls as a modality of living, an agent of becoming, a mechanism of consciousness. Stretchy, elusive, and unpredictable in its unfolding, we mark our joys and traumas by it, shape our futures and remember our pasts through it. What time is, is as much felt as it is representable—more tempo than timeline.

Yet the desire to domesticate and institutionalize time remains the ultimate quest of advanced high capitalist societies. Like an invisible veil of empirical discipline, time, organized by the demands of capitalism, is harnessed to extrapolate and manipulate goods and people within a hyperactive network dependent on perpetual expansion, profit, and consumption. In this configuration, time shapes our days, manages our labor, and subjugates our bodies into unitary instruments of retail. In the context of capitalism, a structure dependent on the promise of freedom through wealth, time’s accumulative logic is stripped and retooled to accommodate the injustices of empire, patriarchy, white supremacy, and the surveillance state. The substance that in pre-industrial eras supported patterns of local customs, indigenous knowledge systems, and individual sensibilities has been irrevocably transformed into an apparatus of oppression.

Escaping the violence of capitalism requires ecstatic work whereby more senseless, useless, and embodied spatiotemporal realities might find opportunity to thrive. Gestures of play, vulnerability, opaqueness, ambiguity, rest, and refusal come to mind, each of them disruptions to the accommodating impulses that work to strangle modes of being antagonistic to capitalist *durée*. Aesthetic praxis—a discourse in which time has never been static or didactic—remains the historical realm where these interventions of delay have thrived. A site of ritual and magic, artifice and imagination, anachronism and simultaneity, art sustains a space of belonging in which forms, figures, and gestures can safely rebel against the conscriptions and injustices of the outside world and lean into the ambiguities and fragmentations that split and wound all that cannot be accommodated. This is akin to what Jack Halberstam defines as “queer time,” or an account of time and space that subverts cisgender, heteronormative, white institutions and expectations of being.² By refusing fixity or assimilation, a space for troubling and revising new forms of time arises. Given the impending ecological collapse our world faces, the grief and retreat from public life brought on by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the spectre of transatlantic slavery that haunts every aspect of inequity in our culture, what kind of aesthetic strategies support such forms of productive untethering and failure?

Propositions in response to this question are invoked in *Time Being*, an exhibition of work by six artists whose investments in an ecstatic, unstable time offer up new articulations of life lived under the logic of white capitalist patriarchy. Again and again, the physical body provides fertile ground for these artists to think through new genres of living, crossing back and forth between individual works and artistic concerns to engage the “cruel optimism” that theorist Lauren Berlant addressed as “inherent to our failing historical present” and our “culture of white, male murderous modernity.”³ As Berlant suggests, in the neoliberal order, time, being, desire, and satisfaction “never add up” to anything more than futility; feelings of fragmentation, numbness, and other nonlinguistic effects are “the body’s response to a world” where crisis and precarity are ordinary.⁴ For these artists, the physical body provides a concept of structure for transitional times—times that are as glitchy, troubled, contingent,

See Saint Augustine, *Confessions and Enchiridion*, trans. A. C. Outler (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 210.

See Jack Halberstam, “Introduction: Low Theory,” in *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 3–5.

See Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 25.

Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 26.



Samantha Wall
We Were Close 2021
73 × 40 inches
Ink on Dura-Lar
You Don't Feel That Far Away 2021
Diptych, 50 × 83 inches
Ink on Dura-Lar



Maya Vivas
**Selections from the
in their own image series** 2021
Various sizes
Ceramic

Elizabeth Malaska
Reflection I (detail) 2017
57 ½ × 45 ½ inches
Charcoal, Flashe on paper



and revelatory as bodies themselves—and a route of possibility that allows for an expansive bodily politics to survive.

In Samantha Wall's series of unfinished and interrupted figures and appendages, a story of the body unfolds, beginning with a series of four small works arranged on the wall like birds in flight. Titled *Missed Connections 1-4* (2020), the piece presents a syntax of hands in various states of extension and entwinement, some caressing one another in tenderness, others reaching into space toward a future touch. Created during a year in which we hungered for the touch of others, Wall's works point to the hand as a gateway to knowledge of self and others—a corporeal archive of the body suspended somewhere within the curling articulations of the fingertips and the cupped orientation of the palm. The intensity of encounter is magnified by the surfaces of Wall's body and its parts, particularly in larger works such as *We Were Close* (2021) and *You Don't Feel That Far Away* (2021). Pools of black ink spread across the contours of the body's geography like an uncontrolled oil spill. Marbled, cratered, amoeba-like, the collage of different textures in Wall's figures registers the body as a landscape where history and memory leave their traces, forever altering its external form and interior chemistry. These are bodies in pain, in process, in potential, carrying the textures of care and crisis along the way.

Scattered similarly across the spread of the gallery wall, artist Maya Vivas's ceramic forms from the in their own image series (2021) coalesce into a visceral organic grammar of materiality, gesture, and gendered potentiality. Slipping between animal, mineral, human, and symbol, Vivas's forms mobilize queer vernaculars to seize space for kinds of becoming that un-do harmful mythologies of "progress" and "categorization" inherent in empirical thinking and heteronormative culture. Stretched, pulled, coiling and unfurling, split and cavernous, folding into and out of phallus and vulva, shedding skin as if chrysalis or as in birth, Vivas's gestural objects never finish or complete, but arrive in their own time, thus opening up space for new bodily transformations to take shape and inherit their own relation to time.

The pressure of gendered experience, of the ways in which the evershifting role of women in Western society imposes upon the female body, is rife in Elizabeth Malaska's mixed-media paintings. A testament to the painter's vast knowledge of art-historical archetypes, Malaska's figures loom large within the frame; they take up space, exude aura, and thus rub against the many conventions and expectations constructed for women across different times and spaces. A series of painterly frowns at the patriarchy, perhaps. While the references to Western masterpieces are abundant, it is *Reflection I* (2017), Malaska's self-portrait, that squeezes temporality not just from the canon, but from the affective atmosphere that encroaches upon women and their public presentation. Rendered in charcoal—a substance that carries traces of the artist's hand and conveys the time of the image in its shadowy materiality—Malaska turns upon the viewer not with overbearing optimism, but with a stare that is cool, calm, distant, unfazed. Her eyes, windows into the soul, double, destabilizing the certain domination of the viewer's gaze. Perhaps she is turning away from us, or looking through us? Or maybe it's a playful reminder that it is not her at all, but an image crafted for others to examine and interpret, a small pause in the deep archive of women, stuttering against the tide of all the women who want to be seen, not constrained. It is the self as stall, as glitch, as system interruption.

Positing the female body as an interruption to historical temporality, artist Bean Gilsdorf's ongoing series of First Lady "portraits" present the bodies of the nation's most pedestaled women as a cultural filter through which various ideas of what America believes itself to be are funneled. Collaged and spliced together from fragments of found photographs, images from history books, and scavenged pink textiles, Gilsdorf's series of eight Jacqueline Kennedys points to the ways in which Jackie's body became an affective field for America itself—a glitch-space in which unadulterated patriotism competed with patriarchal politics, and American optimism slipped into conspiracy theory. Jackie's body, as Andy Warhol understood, was more symbol than flesh, an emblem onto



Bean Gilsdorf
LB 2018
60 × 44 × 29 inches
Polyester, rayon,
aluminum, paint



Lisa Jarrett
Migration Studies (No. 16, Momma will I make it ?; After Octavia E. Butler) 2021
53 × 16 × 53 inches
Mixed media (time travel on braided Spetra hair and rope spool)



Jaleesa Johnston
Overspaced 2019
Two-channel
video installation



Samantha Wall's figures reflect a fragmented interiority influenced by the events of the past year. We see into the body as if looking through an X-ray, but instead of sinew and bone, affective forms are revealed, sculpted by what they touch and what touches them. We are shaped by discourse, current events, and familiar bonds; however, being deprived of social interaction has created a hunger for other bodies, as well as a fear of them. Her figures reflect our longings and conflicted feelings about touch.



Teeter 2021
100 × 40 inches
Ink on Dura-Lar

We Were Close 2021
73 × 40 inches
Ink on Dura-Lar







You Don't Feel That Far Away 2021
Diptych, 50 x 83 inches
Ink on Dura-Lar







Missed Connections 1-4 2020
Various sizes
Ink, gold leaf, Dura-Lar



Contributors

Bean Gilsdorf's artistic practice examines the iconography of American political and cultural histories. Her projects have been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara, the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, and the American Textile History Museum, as well as exhibition spaces in Poland, England, Italy, China, and South Africa. She is the former editor in chief of *Daily Serving*, an international publication for the contemporary arts, and her reviews and essays have been included in publications such as *Art in America*, *Frieze*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and *Momus*. Gilsdorf was a columnist-in-residence for SFMOMA's Open Space, and was the 2018 Art Writer in Residence at SPACES in Cleveland, Ohio. She is the recipient of many grants and fellowships, including an Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant, two Fulbright fellowships to Poland, and a Graduate Fellowship at Headlands Center for the Arts.

Lisa Jarrett is an artist and educator. She is associate professor of Community and Context Arts at Portland State University and the co-founder/director of various collaborations, including KSMoCA (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. School Museum of Contemporary Art) and Art 25: Art in the Twenty-Fifth Century. Her intersectional practice considers the politics of difference within a variety of settings, such as schools, landscapes, fictions, racial imaginaries, studios, communities, museums, galleries, walls, mountains, mirrors, floors, rivers, and lenses. She exists and makes socially engaged work within the African diaspora. She recently discovered that her primary medium is questions.

Jaleesa Johnston is an interdisciplinary artist currently living and working in the Pacific Northwest. She holds a BA from Vassar College and an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute. Her work explores the Black female body as both subject and material through performance, video, photography, sculpture, and collage. She has been the recipient of the AICAD Post-Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Centrum's Emerging Artist Residency, and Open Signal's New Media Fellowship. Johnston has exhibited her work in cities along the West Coast, including San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle, and she currently facilitates workshops and classes in new media and performance art.

Born and raised in Portland, **Elizabeth Malaska** earned her MFA from the Pacific Northwest College of Art. She is known for paintings that explore the place of the female body in a range of art-historical contexts, raising issues about femininity, power, domination, and vulnerability that have social and political implications in our current times. Her work has been included in exhibitions regionally and nationally; in Oregon, it has appeared at Portland Community College's North View Gallery, the University of Oregon's White Box, Disjecta, Milepost 5, Nationale, and the Oregon State Capitol. She is the recipient of a Hallie Ford Fellowship, a grant from the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation, and a 2021 Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in the Fine Arts. Her work is part of the permanent collection at the Portland Art Museum and the Schneider Museum of Art in Ashland.

Maya Vivas is a multidisciplinary artist working in a variety of mediums, including ceramic, performance, painting, and installation. Vivas has exhibited work, spoken on panels, and hosted workshops throughout the United States, at venues and institutions such as the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts, Louisiana State University, and Yale University. Vivas is also co-founder of Ori Gallery, whose mission is to redefine "the white cube" by amplifying the voices of queer and trans artists of color, and by engaging in community organizing and mobilization through the arts.

Samantha Wall, originally from Seoul, South Korea, is an artist working in Portland, Oregon. Wall immigrated to the United States as a child and comes from a multiracial background. Operating from within this framework, her drawings embody the experience of navigating trans-cultural identity. Her projects have been exhibited at the Hangaram Art Museum in the Seoul Arts Center, CUE Art Foundation in New York, and the Portland Art Museum, as well as exhibition spaces in New Orleans, Los Angeles, and Frankfurt. She is the recipient of numerous grants and awards, including an MFA Grant from the Joan Mitchell Foundation, a Golden Spot Residency Award from Crow's Shadow Institute of the Arts, and a Hallie Ford Fellowship from The Ford Family Foundation.

Dr. Jordan Amirkhani's research, writing, and curatorial practice reflect her commitment to intersectional feminist critique and the contextualization of issues of gender, class, and race within the development of European and American art from the nineteenth century to the present. Dr. Amirkhani is currently based in Brooklyn, NY and was recently appointed Curator at Rivers Institute for Contemporary Art & Thought in New Orleans, Louisiana. She is a regular contributor to *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *Daily Serving*, and *Burnaway*.

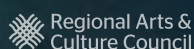
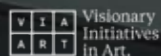
Blake Shell is a curator, arts worker, and artist living in Portland, Oregon. She has worked as a curator and administrator of academic galleries and art organizations since 2002. Exhibitions curated by Shell have received reviews regionally as well as in *Artforum.com's Critic's Picks* and *Daily Serving*. Currently she works at Oregon Contemporary as the Executive and Artistic Director, providing leadership and artistic direction of the organization. She has overseen a strategic overhaul of its practices to focus on stability and professionalizing internal practices with a focus on support for artists and arts workers, and increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Shell also serves as the President of the Northwest Arts Council for the Portland Art Museum and representative of Portland Art Focus. She is a member of the Association of Art Museum Curators and Oregon Contemporary is a member of Common Field.



Time Being was made possible by a generous grant from The Ford Family Foundation. Oregon Contemporary is also supported by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Robert & Mercedes Eichholz Foundation, VIA Art Fund and Wagner Foundation, the Maybelle Clark Macdonald Fund, the James F. & Marion L. Miller Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Oregon Arts Commission, the Oregon Arts and Culture Emergency Fund, Oregon CARES, and the Regional Arts & Culture Council. Other businesses and individuals provide additional support.



THE ROBERT AND MERCEDES
EICHHOLZ FOUNDATION



Oregon Contemporary would like to recognize that our programming is held on the traditional lands of the Chinook, Cowlitz, and many other Nations. We take this opportunity to offer respectful recognition to the Native communities in our region.

OX2021008

Oregon Contemporary is a space dedicated to art, community, and the exponential possibilities of contemporary art. We produce powerful, visionary art programs for the communities of Oregon.

We believe artists provide unique, forward-thinking ways of connecting people to the nuanced issues that define modern life. We regularly promote voices and points of view that have been historically underrepresented in the arts, and engage these populations to impact and intervene in the contemporary arts dialogue.

By showcasing any and all forms of art in our exhibitions and events, Oregon Contemporary supports and empowers artists, curators, and performers, presenting singular experiences for the public every month. Through individual and business donations, as well as grant support, Oregon Contemporary is able to pay arts producers fairly for their work, while offering the majority of our programs to audiences free of charge.

Our major mission programs are the *Portland Biennial*, a major survey of Oregon artists who are defining and advancing the state's contemporary arts landscape; *Curator in Residence*, an annual cycle of exhibitions programmed by emerging talent in the curatorial field; *Site*, a series of large-scale installations featuring Oregon artists; *Culinaria* (Art+Food+Community), a program pairing the talent of artists and chefs to create unique community events; and *Platform*, a space for music, performance, and film.

This book was edited by Allison Dubinsky, photographed by Mario Gallucci, and designed by Adam McIsaac at Sibley House in Portland, Oregon, with color grading and retouching by Peter Jennings. Two hundred copies were printed at Typecraft in Pasadena, California. It is composed principally in Epicene Text, Kris Sowersby's meditation on the 18th century typefaces of Jean-François Rosart and J.M. Fleischmann. The sans-serif is also from Mr. Sowersby: Söhne, which is meant to *feel* like the signage in the New York City subway *looks* rooted in historical form, but with the warmth and materiality of use preserved. If you are at all interested in letterforms as a participant in cultural/art-historical discourse, Mr. Sowersby's extensive design notes (found at klim.co.nz) are as good as it gets. This is already a long colophon, but the display text is composed in Immortel Vena, another reading of Rosart's types, this time by Clément Le Tulle-Neyret. I did not yet find the courage to deploy Epicene Display, and we had already adopted Immortel Vena as Oregon Contemporary's in-house roman.

©2021 Oregon Center for Contemporary Art, Portland, Oregon

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

ISBN 978-1-7341474-1-4



Oregon
Contemporary

8371 N Interstate
Portland, Oregon 97217
503-286-9449
oregoncontemporary.org

