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Jared Pappas-Kelley

Notebook 1:

***Certainty in
Uncertainty***

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Certainty in Uncertainty

The notion of a portent is intriguing in that it attempts to make a *perceived* truth in some way visible—one might say it points like a finger. As an artist, that is often what I find myself attempting, to make a truth visible and to bring it into proximity, so that it might be perceived before sticking my finger in your eye (oops, sorry I never said it always works, but there must always be some risk involved). Holding up a thing for you and saying silently this is important, it means something, and if you look in just a certain manner, you might see something previously imperceptible about yourself or this place where we are. Perhaps this and *this* are the same and this and *that* are not, but it is always more interesting to show what is the same (for me at least). Remembering a song: I might like you better if we slept together.



Portent Drawing, Chimera, ink on paper

I had a bit of a rough day, stacked upon a rough year—come on, you had it too. No? I have been thinking about inevitability and the idea of certainty in uncertain times. During lockdown I began exploring an idea of the portent image, or an image's ability to carry or point. Not in the sense of some woo-woo metaphysical escape, but when the world feels this untethered there often appears a lurching toward an illusion of certainty (for ill or good) in those moments. Fake news. Instead, might

these images and events operate as markers from which to navigate or course-correct in real time?

From this starting point I began making enigmatic (or at least that's how I thought of them) drawings in ink—remember that scene of mashed potato sculptures in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*? Over time these sketches became seventy-four drawings and those were reworked into the initial set of *Wooden Portent* paintings with a series of sound pieces and video se-

quences alongside. From here it developed into a folio of prints (a rethinking of some of the other work I had been doing lately) along with the text and reflections I had been noting down in relation to those pieces.

The new body of work utilized raw mineral pigments, enamel, and wax on wood, for the physicality of the materials and what they embody or voice—and these prints I was making were now on rag cotton paper to be more tangible—beyond merely having a life online or virtually. In this booklet I have also included a recent interview where I discuss the Winchester House in California, Gordon Matta-Clark, Eva Hesse, and Hito Steyerl among others, but also where I have been in my work. Some of this material was covered in my recent book *To Build a House that Never Ceased* as well. In the interview I muse:

“And during lockdown, the scale of things shifted, and new priorities emerged, and yes this is something akin to making art on a smaller scale, but it's a process of making sense of what is before you and how we might proceed or see when everything else falls away.”

For this first notebook/e-zine, I have gathered together images in process, snippets of artist writings or notes and recent things, all collected within the unifying title of *Notebook 1: Certainty in Uncertainty*. Drop me a note and let me know your thoughts or any questions. These prints are a new way of working for me and much of this work, including some of the paintings discussed, is also available through *Invert/Extant* as well.

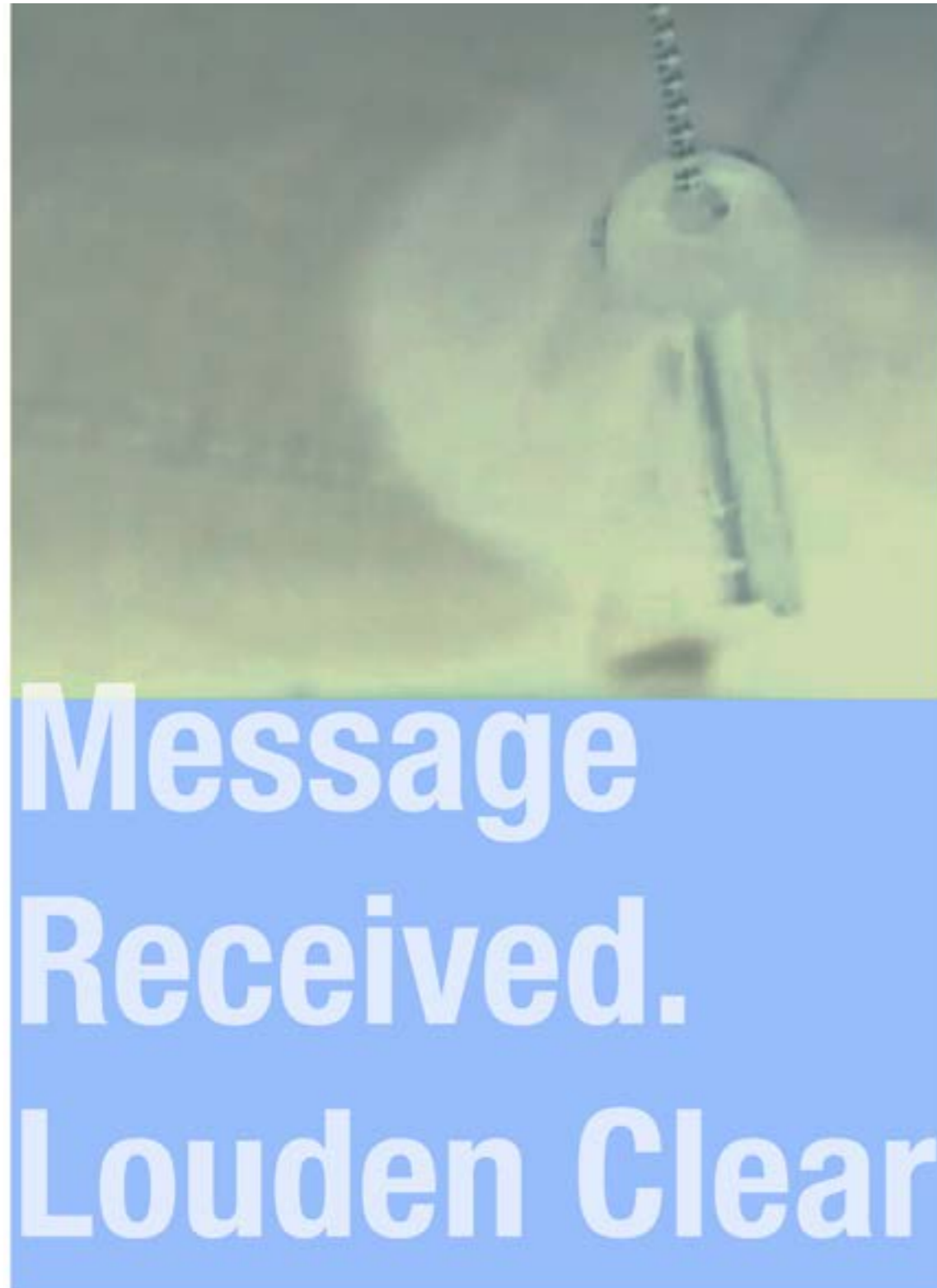
Jared Pappas-Kelley

Folio 1: The Quiet Life and What it Portends

This is the first folio I have been working on in an ongoing series of archival pigment prints. The series began as a reimagining of a conversation with Sylvère Lotringer speaking about Antonin Artaud that developed into the video and sound piece *The Quiet Life* and from exploring the experience of lockdown when the world became simultaneously smaller and more expanded. The collection examines the relation between location and meaning through an unpacking of recent projects such as the *Wooden Portent* paintings, *Desperately Seeking Loudon*, and a trip to the Hearst Castle when he was researching his book *Solvent Form*.

If you would like more info about the folio or to acquire the series of prints in the limited edition of 150, please visit:

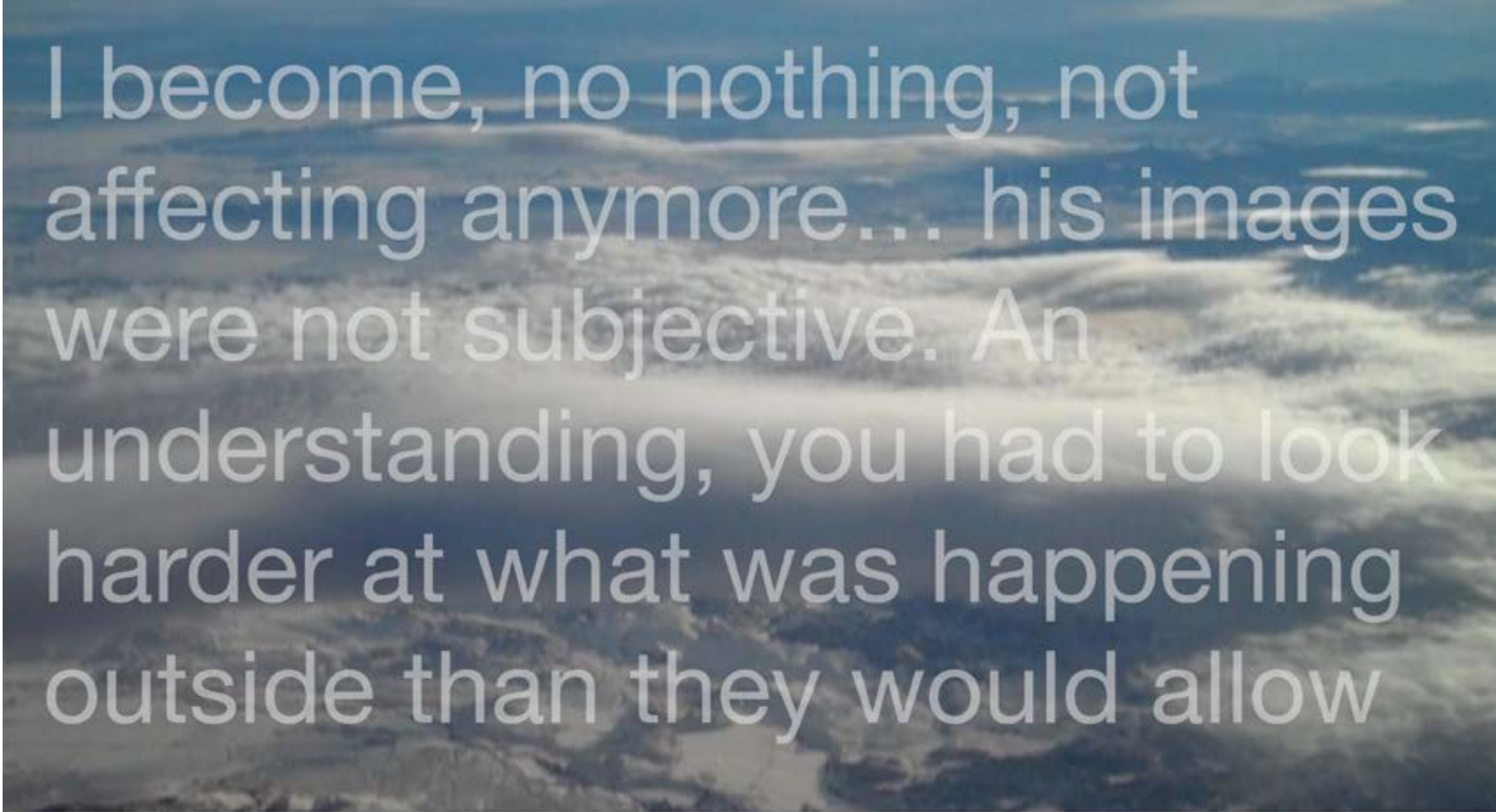
<https://www.invertextant.com/shop>



I have been thinking about how one moment finds parallels in another that does not necessarily resemble it. *Desperately Seeking Louden* was a video piece I made that is predominantly sound driven. I was interested in how one experience slips or rhymes into another and then began developing the images for this folio.



Wooden Portent 3 - The eruption of Mt St Helens was one of my earliest memories: The plume rises heavily and abrupt, miles into the sky, bellows outward, erupting more black than grey with lightning strikes, and sifts to the ground in drifts, clogging everything it comes in contact with. It is dark, smothering and falls like silent snow as the cataclysm unfolds. It ushers an abrupt end of scene in its directness. Interrupts. Catastrophe is simultaneous and all at once. Oddly luminous in its dusk; heavily diaphanous as baroque fabrics in old paintings.



I become, no nothing, not
affecting anymore... his images
were not subjective. An
understanding, you had to look
harder at what was happening
outside than they would allow

These clouds and mountains are the Cascade Range from the last time I was flying into Washington State where I grew up before moving to the UK. I like how something very casual and sort of intimate (filming mountains from a plane window) became something more expansive and general about experience and place. And at the same time, it is clouds, mountains, speaking, repetition, and nothing more. The text was from a conversation that took place a few years

ago in the Swiss Alps with Sylvère Lotringer and was vaguely about the artist Antonin Artaud. For me, the Alps visually rhymed with the experience of the Cascades back home and the conversation about Artaud shifted with our contemporary moment as well. This formed the video/audio piece *The Quiet Life*, which also became part of this print project.



Wooden Portent 7 - Close one eye and open the other. Makes a third. When they see these gaps it comes together, but if they forget they essentially bracket it away. Games of self-preservation, but in the urge, there were also several doors that they keep locked tight at all times and never go into those parts as well. Whenever they walk past, it emits a low rustle of vacated space or the remoteness of closed off rooms.

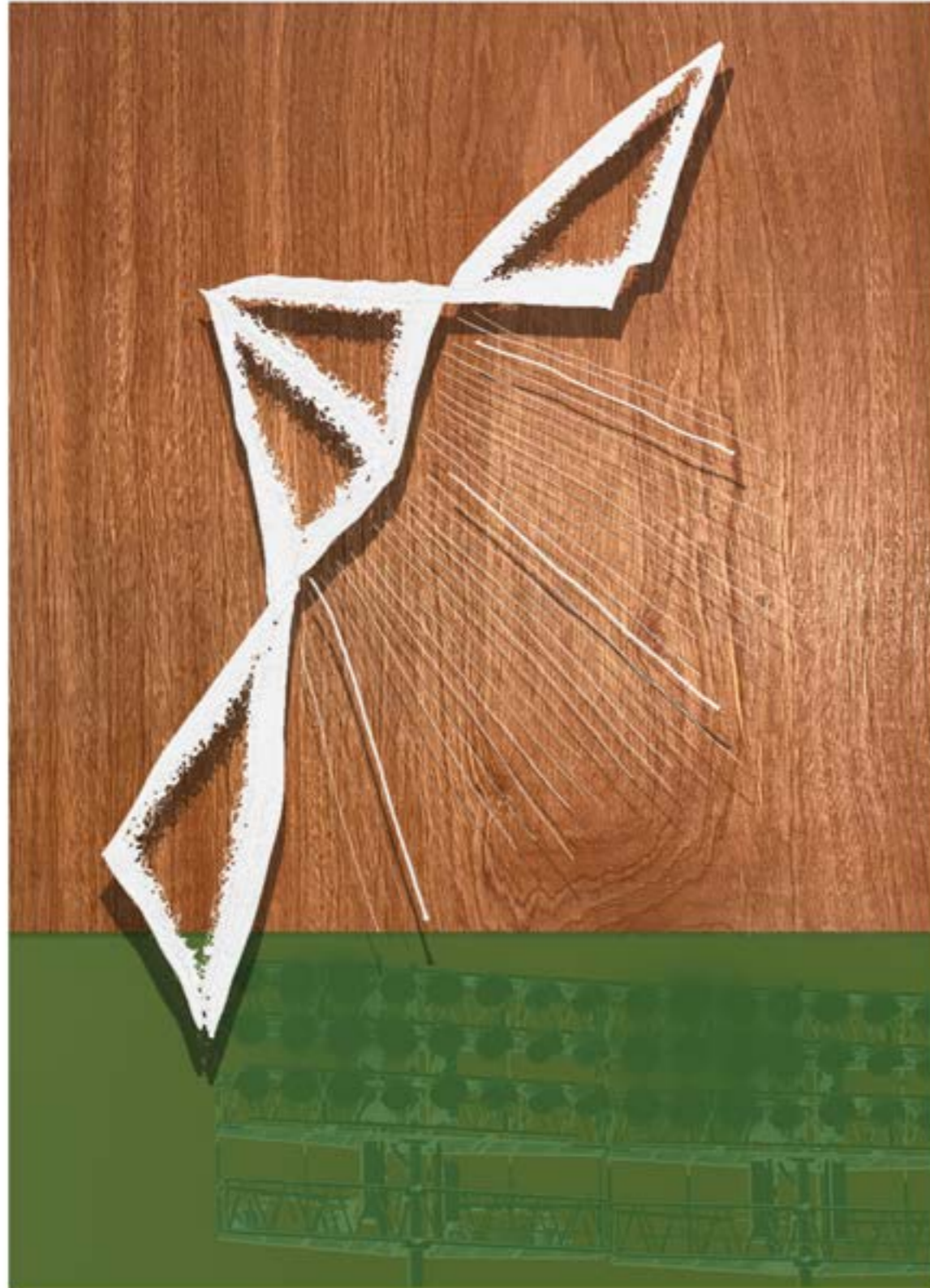


I don't have many pictures of myself from my twenties. When I first finished university, I moved to San Diego as a sort of fresh start. Shortly after arriving, my car was stolen and it had been loaded up with all of my worldly possessions (oops). So many of the sentimental things like photos from that time just don't exist and I was thinking about that and specific locations and times. The image of me was from when I first moved to Seattle and my friend Katie and I were staying at the Radio House (a punk house that was torn down shortly after this photo) and got our picture taken in an old automated photo booth at a bowling alley (we went there specifically for the photo booth).

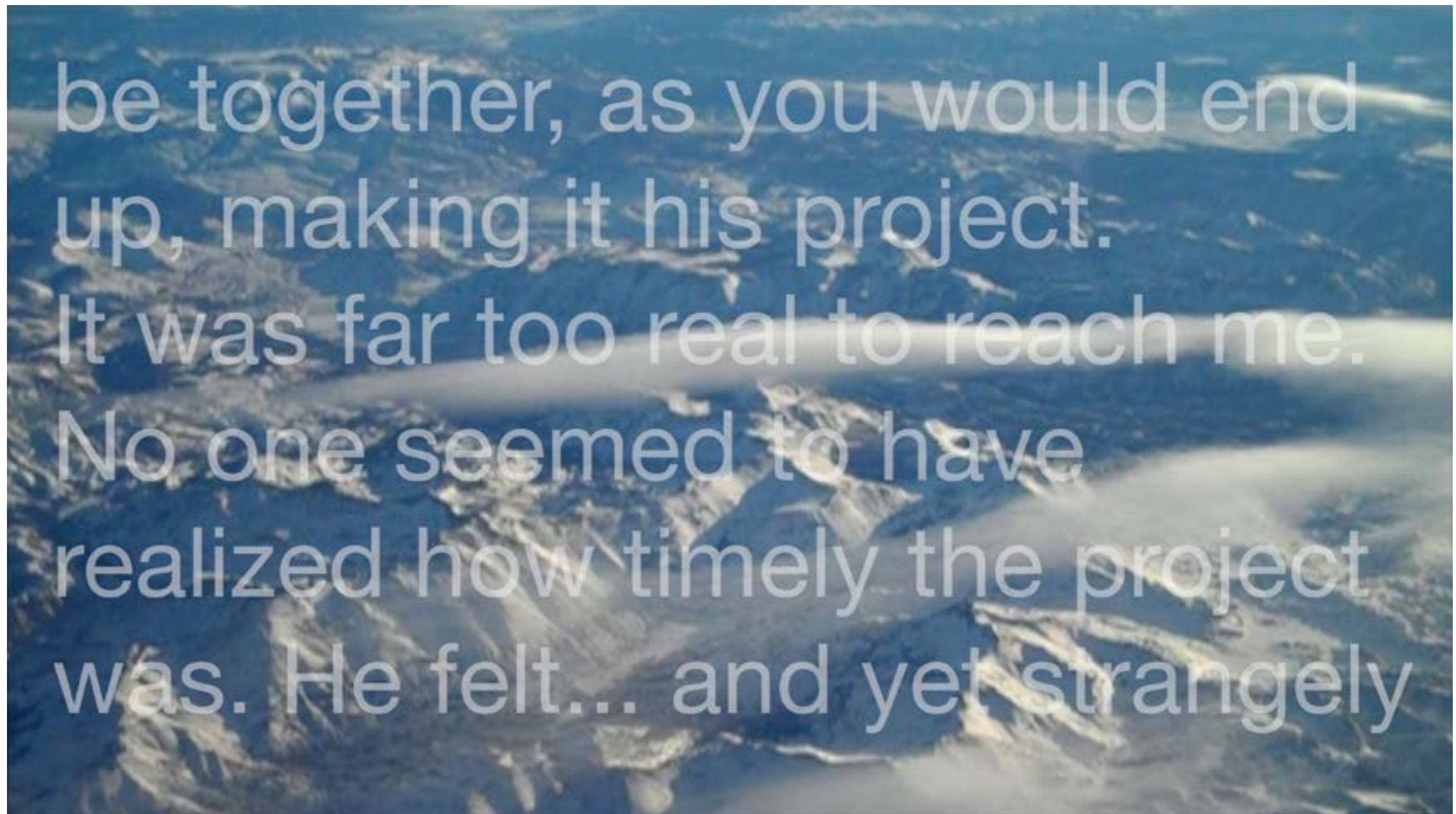
The background image is from the grounds of the Hearst Castle in California. When I was writing the book *Solvent Form*, we took a road trip there as part of my research with my partner, mother-in-law, and father-in-law. My father-in-law "Seal" drove the entire way and had been having health issues around that time, but a couple weeks later he was diagnosed with A.L.S. (motor neuron disease in the UK) and it ended up being one of the last times I spent time around him, so a lot of these memories and that experience have become bundled up together in many ways."



The original video piece for this, *Desperately Seeking Louden*, was built around a verbal tic and sputtering audio loop lifted from a Smiths song. In the song, a singer croons, “message received loud and clear” and it does not resemble a line from the film *Who’s that Girl*, but through mistaken identity Nikki Finn is asked as she enters a hospital: What is your husband’s name? “Louden – Louden what?” Retorting with the first thing coming to mind: “Clear.”



Wooden Portent 34 - What folds closed can also pleat open. What gives an envelope of sorts for something to be perceived can let it mist down like drizzle. At these times it doesn't need to be cooped up and there is no need to be cautious. Left and right unfold like lampposts and the sparks illuminate what was previously difficult to see. Once you know it's there, the container isn't always needed.



be together, as you would end up, making it his project. It was far too real to reach me. No one seemed to have realized how timely the project was. He felt... and yet strangely

In *The Quiet Life*, it was originally just these vast clouds and somewhat sparse, but other times tight words, so the viewer isn't given much to hang on to except the emerging of this other form and their experience of it. A lot of my work and writing lately has been about content coming to terms with a form that

changes, and the installation was my way of trying to examine and resolve a number of these ideas into something tangible.



Wooden Portent 67 - Roots are where energy is stored, but also what draws resources from below and transfers it into new growth. However, there are roots that rest just above the surface, in that they are not yet trunk and not hidden below the soil. They sit like knuckles flexing between the bits that pass away and process light and the bits that draw out moisture or minerals from what has decayed. They give tapered form to both of these impulses.



In Rome we went to some church (to probably see a particular painting, but I don't remember now) and upon entering, the church was closed for a private event, so I literally just popped my head in and took a snapshot of the dome. As I mentioned I don't have many photos of myself, so the other image was something posted to social media by someone I knew. It's interesting what turns up and I like how low quality or pixelated images like this tend to be. I think the original photo was taken at a coffee shop where I worked at the time in the Northwest (US) and if I remember, I had the flu and a fever, but had to go into work anyway—so one of the only photographs of me from that time, I was sick as a dog, but also that probably adds something to the image and it's intriguing how all these images together overlap.



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Portent 52 - The more we walk a pathway, the more it leaves trails through the underbrush. Over lifetimes it creates a schematic of sorts and indirectly as a record of a type of knowledge. Wandering this path leads to water, or here is shelter or things sought or avoided over there. We might come into contact with the people down this road if we continue that way.

By wandering them, we inscribe a certain pattern and bring it into use and connect it across time. Becomes easier to access. Wider. The grid of a city is a means of communicating and transmitting the dynamism in how it directs and channels the movements of its inhabitants and the pathways it keeps open through their usage.



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Interview: To Build a House that Never Ceased

Thomas Tyler and Jared Pappas-Kelley

To Build a House that Never Ceased is a new collection of writings by Jared Pappas-Kelley, seeking to take apart ideas of solvency in art and building on his other recent book *Solvent Form: Art and Destruction*. Following a tradition of artist writers, the collection presents an opportunity to reflect and re-examine existing thoughts—bisecting and dissecting the metaphorical rooms of writing, to see how they might collapse or build something new. I spoke with Pappas-Kelley about his new book including the connections between Winchester and Matta-Clark, the allure of road trip culture on the American psyche, and why the term contemporary is problematic when considering art. We also spoke about the artist Jeremy Blake, Auto-destructive art and Gustav Metzger, as well as working for the company that became Wikipedia. Throughout, there was an underpinning about these positions that seem particularly heightened in the era of Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter.

Thomas Tyler: Thanks for agreeing to this interview for your upcoming book *To Build a House that Never Ceased: Writings, Interviews, and Letter on Art*. I found it to be a useful follow-up for your last book *Solvent Form*, displaying the stems of early ideas or the thinking that went into the book in a more informal or easily digested manner.

Jared Pappas-Kelley: Thanks, yes that was sort of the idea for this, to gather together all of those origin-bits or parts that led onto blind alleys, but that were hopefully a little more accessible or shared a certain inverted architecture for understanding some of those ideas. I've been reading [Haruki] Murakami lately and he has this idea that in writing, it's gathering all of these fragments of string, or twig, or bone, or details, or ideas and he assembles them into this mound of sorts with the hope that it will come to life. For me this process was a bit like that, but I also wanted to include things that were leading into work I've been doing for another book that I am currently finishing up called *Stalking America*, or other things I have been thinking about, because for me a lot of this material is related or behind the curtain, and I have been stewing on these things (or stacking them in piles) for a long time and when I actually sit down and look back there are all these traced pathways across.

TT: One of the things I would like to address

is the ghost that seems to have haunted your thinking for a long time, the ghost of Winchester Mansion?

JPK: In America, the Winchester House is very tied to an idea of road trip culture, of Americana. There is something very American about hopping in a car with marathon drives across long distance to experience the country you inhabit or figure it out somehow. Perhaps at the moment it is getting more insular again or divided, but there is this allure of the road trip—road trip movie, the old Beat writers, freedoms, or people forced to traipse to a new beginning from the dust bowl days for a new way of life. And it feels a bit extra romantic amid the current covid-19 and now with BLM when everyone is holed up in our tiny worlds. There is this romance that if you can understand the road, travel, this big messed up country we inhabit, that through it you will be able to understand something about yourself or the larger context. Road narratives are about the freedom to experience the self or as a mirror for understanding something interior to who we are.

So, growing up around Washington state as a kid, getting into a car with friends or family, a road trip down to the bay area in California would probably take about thirteen to fifteen hours of non-stop driving, so it was ambitious but doable if you set your sights to it. And it is the sort of thing we would do

sometimes, set your eye to a horizon, hop in a shitty car that you hoped wouldn't break down, and just power through—maybe you and a couple other people so you could take shifts each while driving. And the Winchester House was always one of those sorts of roadside attractions. Get out, stretch your legs, like the redwood forest with the giant Paul Bunyan and Babe the blue ox statues (with its immense blue balls that every teenager notices or snaps a pic of). And then when I lived at Palo Alto when I was at Stanford, it was like forty minutes away and you'd see signs on the side of the highway counting down until you got closer. But Winchester was always sort of like that to me, something in the periphery that I knew existed and what it was, but I never actually got out and had a look until I started writing about it.

Around this time there was also a series of video pieces that got me thinking about the Winchester House again by the artist Jeremy Blake and that started me considering it in a different way. He has a quote about how as an artist going into a space like that, he wanted to draw some sort of meaning from it, to show a sort of psychology of the builder, and this is sort of what a lot of us end up trying to do with art. Shows us how to make sense of what's around but also wrangle with the things that don't quite make sense. He sees it as an alchemical expression, trying to

show the motivation or character of the surroundings. In a way that's what a lot of this was. Also, if you aren't familiar with Jeremy Blake's story there's a lot there as well that fits with this. And his story is another metaphor... Very dramatic, double suicide with his girlfriend and possibly being harassed by a cult at sort of the height of his career, bizarre, and sad.

TT: Sarah Winchester wanted to dissolve the weight of her vast inheritance by keeping the Winchester mansion under constant (re) construction, destroying to erect and so on.

JPK: I would argue we all do that, maybe not on such a grand scale. I think in some capacity, we are all just trying to be okay with ourselves, to work something out or pick apart these knots that we are presented with that we ultimately don't understand completely. We inherit a history: I'm living in a shitty town in the north where people don't really like me or what I represent, or I'm from a desirable place, I'm urban or I'm rural, I'm too working class for my own good or too posh. It's sort of where we start from and how we respond to it and will be different depending on who we are or certain privileges or hardships. Some people will never question it and just sort of embrace it full force and carry on from cradle to grave, or others might rebel or distance or try to work it out in some sense like an Edie Sedg-

wick, David Bowie, or a Quentin Crisp. Music and popular culture, or life, are full of these types of stories.

Sarah Winchester married into this family and then her husband and child died, and she inherited all of this money and was suddenly the wealthiest woman in the world at the time. And the money was from the sale and patents on the Winchester rifles, which were responsible for decimating the indigenous populations in the clearing of the American west. It's a really brutal history. So, she's grieving, alone, and extremely wealthy, and the money was from death in a sense. How do you make sense of that, what are you going to do? Think of the scale of that, like the people who built the atomic bomb, that is death on a new scale historically. But also remember, there is sort of the folk tale version as well.

TT: Perhaps it would have been easier for her to discard the large fortune (maybe give to those she felt she had wronged?), rather than burning it internally—I'm not sure this gesture paid her debt. Or if it did, then only in an eye for an eye manner, in the sense that she suffered.

JPK: Well that is the difference between thinking of her as a metaphor or image, and I wrote a bit about this in *Solvent Form* and again in this new collection. This all works

as a metaphor, the folk tale version, but it is also an individual's story and I am working with it more as a metaphor because when the image we hold comes up against the reality they tend to undo each other and that is mostly what that book was about in a more general sense. I had been working with Bataille's idea of an *Accursed Share* where this surplus needs to be squandered or spent to undo in some manner. As a metaphor it doesn't work as a transaction where each death equals a specific dollar amount. What, does she write an immense check and say, 'we good?' I guess it could, but I don't know if it works that way exactly, there's more. It doesn't work as a transaction, and also it all sort of undoes Sarah and that's what we see when we look at this neurotic or esoteric space she created.

In a sense she is just trying to keep busy, to work something out for herself and live in the shadow of something. This inherited weight. But we also have to keep in mind that this is the story that works as a metaphor and not really the daily reality of her life. It's a myth or metaphor that is fun to tell or draw conclusions from, and who knows how accurate any of it actually is, but it's also a life. When I was there, the tour guide had a much more human perspective and spoke about it in terms of mental health or isolation and the grieving process of a lonely woman. So maybe that is another metaphor that relates to us now and we can

draw all these threads, it's just a matter of looking at the ones relating to where we are most in any given moment. The other ones don't necessarily go away.

TT: What are your thoughts on Sarah's actions in the context of her paying the Winchester family blood debt, perhaps she was a victim of impossible exchange?

JPK: Yes, it is by definition an impossible exchange I suspect. You can't put a cash price on a life, or perhaps there's some scary algorithm for it now, but that's what this means. You've inherited this thing, but you still have to live and figure out the shape of who you are and what you will do. And that's also what art does, we've inherited the keys to the city and maybe it's lovely, but perhaps it's also some shitty city. What are we going to do? How do we understand it or make meaning? Do we start building or tear it down—or maybe just squat? Winchester kind of figured out a way to do both, she tears down to continue building. And actually, that's what most things we do entail. We have to undo something to create something new (even if it is just the idea of what existed before or an assumption of 'how things are done') and so most of what we do rolls this process into one action and we never really see or notice it. Everything we do has to clear a space or undo something that exists in order to continue. A world in motion wants to be changed. So, for me Winchester

shows how these impulses are rolled up together, to allow us to see it in action, otherwise we might not notice.

TT: Winchester is a great example of change in motion and as you unpack your thoughts it is clear why you have allowed this ghost to haunt you. One must undo in order to create something new, it's about balance—many artists have inserted destruction into their process of creation, a topic that is prominent in your work as well. Sarah Winchester was destroying to create, as opposed to creating by destroying, perhaps you could outline some parallels between Winchester House and Auto-destructive art?

JPK: Well, Auto-destructive Art is a very specific historical thing. The artist Gustav Metzger developed the term around the 60s and created a series of manifestos for what constituted it, so it is something very specific, but in a general sense we might look at more recent works like Ed Ruscha's *Royal Road Test* where the artist threw a typewriter out of a car window on a speeding highway and documented the destruction or in Jonathan Schipper's work *The Slow Inevitable Death of American Muscle* where two gleaming muscle cars are incrementally winched into each other and replicate a car crash in extreme slow motion in a gallery space. They rely of the spectacle of destruction as a means of creation. Yet in this sense it is also about historicizing or preserving

these artefacts that use destruction as an image. Someone recently accused me of being an art historian and I almost spit at them—not that there is anything wrong with art historians, some of my best friends are art historians... what they do in the privacy of their own homes is none of my business—but that is fundamentally not my concern. I am primarily an artist and an artist writer, something I must keep shouting, and when I approach this stuff, it is as material, an intervention or reframing, perhaps even as an installation inside the mind. Almost approaching it as some thwarted conceptualist where the often-clinical aesthetic of those practices collapses into the too much in the form of monographs or the novel. I don't separate between my writing and the things I make and that is important for considering this work on its own terms.

I also recently started a small publishing imprint that attempts to put these ideas into practice called [Invert/Extant](#) which starts with the premise of flipping or inverting these things that we inherit out there in the world as a way of seeing or understanding on a deeper level. So far it is mostly artist writings, but also novels that catch us unawares in the moment. One of the projects I have been developing there is a collection of new manifestos that includes work by philosophers like

Simon Critchley and Jean-Luc Nancy as well as artists like Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra, as a way to rethink where we are and where we might go next. Anyway, to bring it back, one of the texts for this project was a short manifesto that Gustav Metzger wrote for me and it was probably one of the last things he wrote before his death. And this is lovely, and it's about these conversations and for me it is about being an artist that is a thinker in the old sense of the word and making something new out of all these things we've inherited, creating with it and through it, and yes taking these things apart to construct anew. That's what Winchester and Metzger teach us.

TT: It is interesting, the way you approach your subject matter, although you are primarily writing about art you seem to hold Sarah Winchester on the same creative (destructive) pedestal as Gustav Metzger—is this intentional?

JPK: In a way I think it is looking at people and how they try to make sense of their world, which is something I am also attempting. How they create something that comes from the way they see the world operating. Maybe it's a rejection or an embrace. You look at things and notice patterns and that helps you understand other things. There seems to be a lot of

ideas in all of this around architecture or cutting across conceptual structures or undoing unhelpful calcifications of ideas that cause us to get stuck. I wrote a bit about Gordon Matta-Clark in this book as a sort of inverted Sarah Winchester operating from another side, cutting across and revealing what becomes hidden or accidentally enclosed in these existing structures.

TT: Destruction is often associated with rejection, with this in mind it could be said that destruction has been adopted by artists in an effort to reject the art world. Do you agree with this statement? Perhaps you could respond with Banksy's *Shredding Girl with Balloon* in mind?

JPK: Well yes, there is the whole iconoclasm of it, the conquering armies chopping off the heads and arms of all the statues in a capital or like the pulling down of a statue of Hussein or Stalin—the theatricality of that action. Again, this is happening with the removal of statues glorifying slave trade in response to Black Lives Matter. Or the Futurists denouncing boring art of the time—so slow! —or Cubists rejecting how surface operated. I wrote a fair amount about the Banksy shredding at that Sotheby's auction right after it happened. I don't have a particular affinity with Banksy, seems more of

an edgy coffee table book, but bigger in the UK where I now live. The event was so orchestrated and demure in a sense, not necessarily art biting the hand that feeds it, but more art maybe nibbling at the fingernails—a bit worried—of the hand that feeds it?

But there was also something intriguing about that event, and the way it was everywhere like a meme and perhaps the chatter online around it and that was what I found more interesting. That was the bit that made me consider it again, and also that it happened pretty much the week that *Solvent Form* came out which made it all very timely. I suspect my publisher was annoyed that it didn't get included in my previous book for the hype, but it is in this one in a more considered manner.

TT: One of your projects, Tollbooth Gallery was a collaboration between yourself and Michael Lent years ago. The Tollbooth occupied an abandoned/heavily vandalised information kiosk in urban Washington state, and you used it to facilitate eight video and paper-based installations per year.

When reading your notes on the project in the book you present a handful of, in my opinion, poetic metaphors that frame

the project's fragility in a way that makes it feel alive. For example, the project needing to build a relationship with its audience in order to survive (literally). And comparing the seamless exhibition changeover to passing seasons, could this be a nod to (hypothetical) paper falling like leaves?

JPK: That was one of the interesting things about putting this book together. I could go back and trace many of the germs of ideas or themes in how I work from really early projects and ways of working in general. Through those conversations. I have always been intrigued by this idea of shared and public space, but also in contesting an idea of corporatized public space. Who has access? I also have always been intrigued by projects that could do a lot with the things that others don't bother with or don't see much value in. How do you invert that and make something amazing or challenging to how we think? The title for this book, the notion of building a house that never ceased, comes from Sarah Winchester and this desire to construct something that was about a process, perpetually being reworked and undoing itself in order to continue building as a mode for understanding something—a sort of self-questioning and restlessness from which it builds.

TT: Tollbooth seems to function as a past monument to your *content* approach to change within art, to summarise you chose to curate paper-based public art alongside video, both transient or time-based mediums in their own right. The project presented very similar ideas to those espoused in your thinking/writing, can you tell me more about how the two approaches informed or fed each other, and what's it like to work as an artist and thinker as you call it?

JPK: Well, paper and video are cheap, ubiquitous, they're at hand and they both possess an odd sort of authority. We don't really think about them—they're homework or books or flyers or TVs or news on monitors, on phones, in pubs and shop windows, so we don't really consider much with them, but they structure a lot of the ways we interact or consider the world. They were a nice starting point and oddly tactile and could easily be swapped in or out in a public space and allowed people to think differently about how they might interact in these public spaces.

I guess in a way they are about questioning these architectures, that theme again, or challenging them—how an idea or action might undo existing structures

or functions or spaces. And at the same time the work of art was the Tollbooth itself and these interactions it facilitated, but then it also was these individual commissioned works by people like Wynne Greenwood of Tracy + the plastics who had been doing work at the Whitney or the Kitchen in New York at the time or Fionn Meade who went on to become artistic director at Walker Art Center and curator at SculptureCenter in New York.

You mentioned this content approach that you noticed in my work before. One of my first jobs out of university was working in managing content for the company that eventually became Wikipedia (Bomis/Nupedia), like the very beginning, so some of those early experiments or those framing structures and contested meanings that we were developing there at a formative time probably influenced how I approached these other projects like the Tollbooth which I began shortly after that. Also having grown up in Olympia and Seattle when the music scene was blowing up and K Records and Kill Rock Stars probably affected how I approached artist networks and rethinking distribution models for ideas.

TT: So, for you it's less about what the work is and more about what it does—in this case what it does to the Tollbooth and its habitat?

JPK: There's a quote from Eva Hesse about art: 'Don't ask what it means or what it refers to. Don't ask what the work is. Rather, see what the work does.' We live in that world now, we inhabit it and in a sense with those early projects especially, it was putting this concretely into action, allowing us to inhabit them and build a nest from within them and then taking them to that next level as building blocks.

TT: Do you view the current world in which we wait and see what art does as contemporary, or perhaps as Simon Critchley has proposed, it should be viewed as something else entirely?

JPK: Yes, that's something I've been thinking about a lot and I wrote about it a bit in this collection. The idea of contemporary as a sort of catch-all category in art. People think it means that it is just art of now, what's happening—and that's a very passive view, but there is more to it as a sort of ideology and the thinking around it doesn't go much

deeper than that. Critchley has proposed that the problem with using a term like contemporary is that we think we all know what it means, but we don't so our understanding is drastically impoverished.

Hito Steyerl has also talked about it in terms of a misconception that all technology would sync-up, like my phone, a printer, the cloud, neural networks, digital doo-dads—that we are all living in this super-synced up moment in time, but the reality is that nothing actually syncs the way it is meant to. It's sort of a myth and maybe we are always trying to find little ways to pull out of this sync or in these bubbles where we are only shown content or feeds that reflect us. So, we instead spend our time screening calls and dodging texts, deferred until later, never in the moment, and for Steyerl one of the defining characteristics of this idea of contemporary is that it gives an illusion of everything lining up in the now but in fact nothing does. And that is contemporary, but I've also been thinking of it in terms of something Jack Halberstam has discussed in an exhausted manifesto. He wonders what is this exhaustion that saturates both leisure and work time in an era of collapse? It's

this effect we experience with it. Speculating, ‘Even as we are drowning in the more, the extra, the also, we are stuck with systems that commit to less, to expediency, to rigor and to discipline.’ It is about the keeping up of appearances, proposing a prosthetic masculinity as he puts it, but is already evident in a world of art that seems perpetually resorting to marital aids just to give the illusion of keeping it up. Halberstam observes it in terms of the James Bond film *Skyfall*, dealing with themes of weariness of aging, the diminished futurity, even death as a cover for a vacation. Halberstam asks:

“What is this exhaustion that saturates both leisure and work time in an era of collapse? Why does our James Bond, the Bond of 2012, find himself tired and disoriented while previous Bonds have been hard to keep up with let alone hard to kill? Have we, at the beginning of the 21st century, expended all creative, natural, spiritual and political energy so that, like the over stretched economy, humanity is twisting in the wind, too tired to move, too exhausted to stay still, too selfish to die?”

I wrote about that a bit in the collection and with another project I’m working on, and it feels timely, perhaps more so in a world with Covid-19. Also in a sense,

Covid-19 and this notion of contemporary are linked with ideas in *Solvent Form*, something that comes along and shows what was already there or has disappeared behind the image of what we hope to present. It brings you back to this moment whether you want to or not.

TT: When reflecting on your forthcoming project *Stalking America*, you draw some comparisons between situations (moments in time), Y2K, flying, shipwrecks, etc, and frame them as sharing a bliss relationship with destruction. It seems to me that these situations also share a lack of control, you hop on a plane with the hope of getting somewhere and you are now at the will of the world’s autonomy. It’s a journey, and perhaps making an artwork is also a journey, but the destination is no longer important?

JPK: Well it is seeing the accident or interrupt as a sort of miracle in reverse, the inverted miracle that delivers something you would not otherwise notice or be able to see. It feels like all of the in-between stuff gets bracketed out, the experience that goes from departure to arrival gets prioritised away. That’s why none of the characters that are actually important in *Stalking America* have names and it’s kind of about the mundane fussy bits that get cut away in telling a story, it’s an in-

version and who knows how well it actually works and not much actually happens there. I recently shared it with someone I’ve worked with in the past and she hated it and really couldn’t see past what it was about, but for me there is something about this specific moment and our experience of it in that. The unimportant bits seem to gather more details, or we file them away somewhere as they don’t fit our view of what we want—fake news. And yes, it’s like those things where Y2K was supposed to be this major thing but ended up being a mostly non-event so was brushed aside, and as you said with travel, we sort of forget about all these interim experiences that pile up waiting for the next scary thing.

But yes, it is also about what’s beyond our control, although I might not have phrased it that way, but to bring it back to Covid-19 it’s these things that come in and interrupt how things have been and force us to reconsider and see things differently—or with BLM, it makes the things that were already broken visible. And during lockdown, the scale of things shifted, and new priorities emerged, and yes this is something akin to making art on a smaller scale, but it’s a process of making sense of what is before you and how we might proceed or see when everything else falls away.

TT: Totally, in many ways Covid-19 or these other things have burst the bubble and unclouded a lot of the distractions of contemporary life. I feel like there was this anticipation, we have long been waiting for something to break, perhaps this is it? I would like to thank you Jared for sharing some insight on your new book: *To Build a House that Never Ceased* and wrap things up by asking what you are currently working on and what you have planned for the uncertain future?

JPK: As I said I have been working on several publishing projects, a collection of artist writings and reflections from the composer Bill Dietz and an anti-memoir about art and autism from Zak Ferguson. That's the publishing imprint *Invert/Extant* along with the collection of manifestos, but I've also been developing a new body of large-scale wall drawings called *Portents* that are meant as 'enigmatic symbols' that rely on chance operations. It feels like the world at this moment just isn't the same as the world six months ago or even a few weeks ago. Like I said, a world in motion wants to be changed and that's where we are.

[To Build a House that Never Ceased: Writings, Interviews, and Letters on Art](#) is available through *Sweat Drenched Press*.

Jared Pappas-Kelley is an artist and writer. His visual work has exhibited internationally at places such as San Francisco MoMA, Mass MoCA, Five Years in London, Islington Mill in UK, and Glasgow International as part of the National Review of Live Art. His recent book *Solvent Form: Art and Destruction* was published by Manchester University Press, his collection *To Build a House that Never Ceased: Writings, Interviews, and Letters on Art* was released in August of 2020, and his novel *Stalking America* is forthcoming in 2021.

INVERT **EXTANT**