

Dear L,

Thank you for opening up the conversation. Your warm words indeed opened up my mind, so I would like to have a real conversation with you and guide you to my research rather than giving you the superficial presentation I had promised earlier. I don't normally do this, but let's pretend we're sitting in my studio looking at images and clicking through the links from my computer together.

Regarding the guide to my current research, I am in the “**spy**” stage of an ongoing project that I haven't spoken about elsewhere yet. I will explain my use of the word “spy” later. I hope you will read my story *leisurely* because nothing is absolute at this stage of the thought process.

For the past few projects, my work has developed around [visualizing literature](#) in various forms, with [coincidences](#) happening on the [exhibition site](#) and [during the process](#). As a metaphor for the cycle of artwork being made and exhibited, I have been creating my work as if I were developing the chapters of a book and working toward publication. The terminology of literature and book publication was often adopted in its tangible form when it comes to [presentation](#) (e.g., proofs, drafts).



(top) installation shot of Draft: Sans Self, at DOOSAN Gallery
(right) Draft: Sans Self, 2016, Mosaic with marble and smalti glass, hydraulic cement, resin, neoprene 101x61x3.8cm

The majority of the object-based, labor-intensive artwork I have made so far (e.g., mosaics, stained glass, etching prints, etc.) is the **byproduct** of this thought process. This is a quote from my recent artist's statement:

“I believe that each of my works has a unique biorhythm. Thus, to keep the symbiotic relationship between my work and myself healthy, I try to be the partner, not the master, of my works. However, it remains difficult for an artist to avoid claiming **authorship** of a work that he or she has spent a long time creating. Therefore, in my studio, each time I create visual objects, I work as my own “fabricator” employed by my “future self.” In this way, my present self can be fully immersed in the creation process without being distracted by the issue of what I am saying through my work. The responsibility of analyzing the work's voice falls to my future self. This metaphorical division of labor allows my symbiotic relationship with my work to continue.”

To conduct an in-depth conversation, I also have often collaborated with a ventriloquist to talk about the symbiotic relationship between the artwork and the artist. Below, you will find an illustrated lecture I gave at the Jewish Museum and DOOSAN Gallery in NY.



Carla Rhodes and Cecil Sinclair at the Jewish Museum, NY, 2016

The video lecture screening part: <https://vimeo.com/230888106/2ac9d5996e>
Excerpt (highlight) of Carla & Cecil Performance <https://vimeo.com/182018261/a5bae85b52>



Mary Boo Anderson and Carla & Cecil at DOOSAN Gallery, NY. Performing "[In Praise of Cry Breaks](#)" 2016

Last spring, for the [semifinal iteration](#) of a long-term project in which I used the terminology of book publication as a metaphor for artwork production, I published my own pseudo-book titled ***Four of Mattresses Stacked on Misery*** and promised that its launching event would be the grand finale of the whole project. Nearly a hundred people pre-ordered my "book," which was an anthology of memos written and collected on my cell phone since 2009. In this era of smartphones, cloud, and email, I have noticed that every time I take notes on my cell phone, they go into my e-mail inbox as if I were writing draft letters to my future self from my past/present self. I am fascinated by these unsent messages, drafts, and fragments. While performing the tedious editorial work of collecting and selecting each note and learning to make book, I pondered what Robert Musil, to whom I referred frequently in my previous projects, might have been thinking when he collected and published his writings for his [The Posthumous Papers of a Living Author](#).



Four of Mattresses Stacked on Misery on display at Galle*y Proof, Lenfest Center for the Art. 2017

Then, I was lucky to escaped to a prestigious [residency in Skowhegan](#) Maine, USA, where I visited a gruesome local [museum](#), a very (un)organized cabinet of curiosities, including collection of curios,

taxidermy object, fossils, and other things that are no longer alive. While chatting with an old curator of the museum, I learned that the museum was an orphanage (*Good Will-Hinckley Homes for Boys and Girls*, founded in 1889) in the past century. Here, the orphans were trained in many skills so that they could find jobs when they reached adulthood.

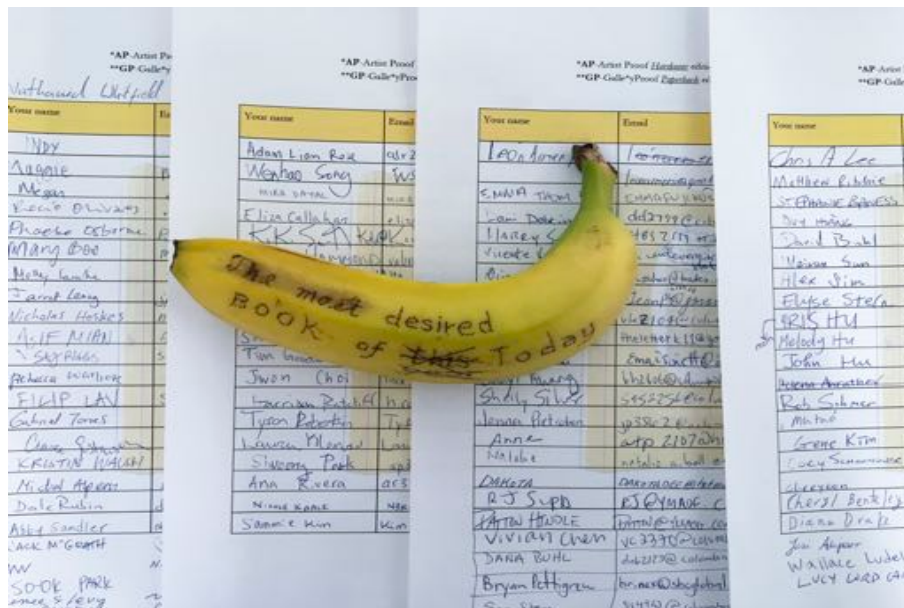


Good Will boys on the front steps of the Quincy Manual Training School for Boys on the campus of Good Will-Hinckley. The building is now the L.C.Bates Museum, Maine (image courtesy to www.mainememory.net)

What caught my eye was a grimy-dusty printshop in the museum's damp basement. It was here that the orphans learned about setting letterpress types, inking, cranking the press, and binding books. They had to learn *how to make books* for their *survival*. I majored in printmaking, so I was familiar with most of the equipment. I felt a deep, immediate sense of connection to this place.



Meanwhile, during my isolation in my Skowhegan studio, I nearly gave up on my own precarious “book.” I was slowly visualizing the finale of the project: instead of the *launch* I had promised to hundreds of people at my previous exhibition, I was preparing a *burial* of my book. I also canceled a gallery event I scheduled for the book launch performance. However, I felt guilty when I thought of the people who were waiting for the book.



Pre-order sign up list of *Four of Mattresses Stacked on Misery*, 2017

The museum’s curator, Deborah, offered to display my work anywhere in their space. This Romanesque revival style museum, a former orphanage, was a nearly perfect place for the burial site of my book: I wanted to kill my book but also wanted it to be remembered; the museum automatically fossilizes anything that enters its cabinets.

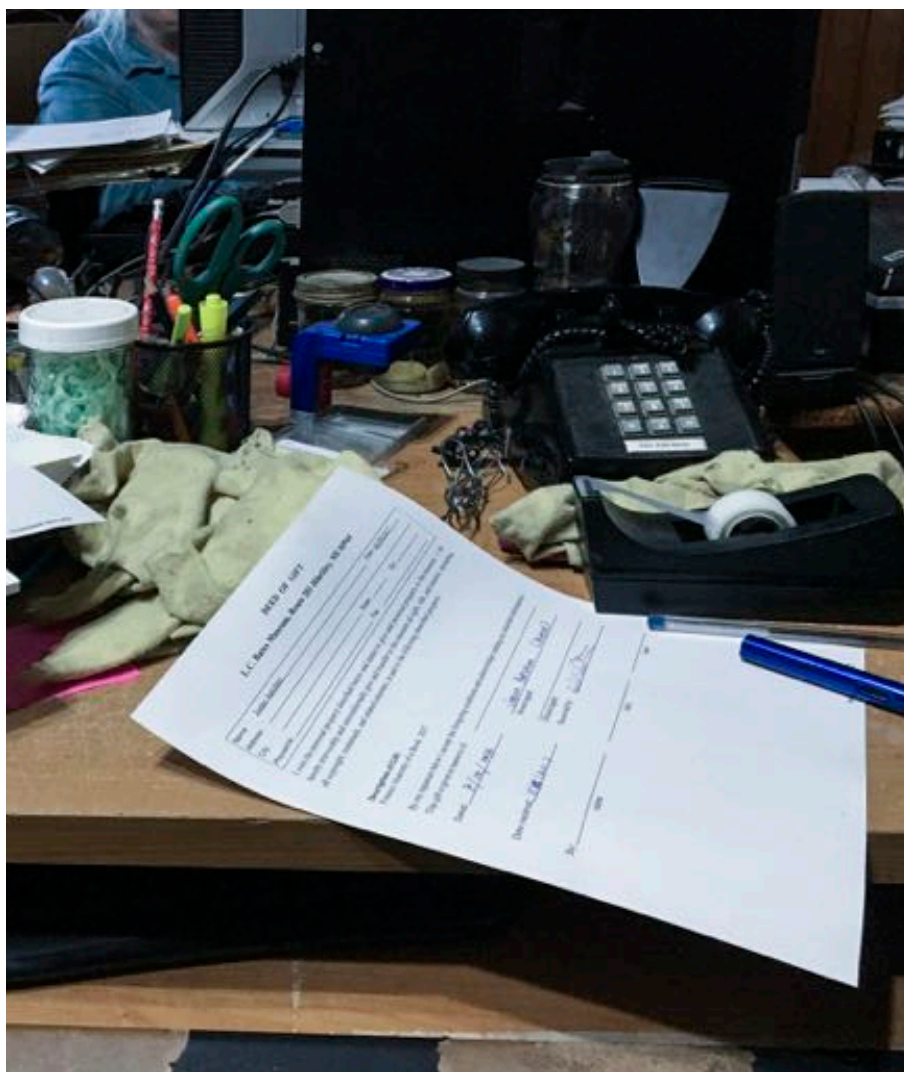
My chosen tool for my book’s fossilization was **fresco painting**, which I had just learnt to do in Skowhegan residency. A fresco is another ancient method of image making with an approach similar to that of hat of mosaics, which I have previous used in ideas for antiquities. Again, I was employed by my own future self for this fabrication “gig.”

Though I rarely do painting for my work, I learned how to paint in fresco and made a fresco triptych of my book to accurately record its physical appearance. I hung the fresco triptych in the corner wall of the print shop, where the orphans had learned to make books. To achieve site-specificity, I used my book as an example image of the *Anatomy of a Book*, as it was a training site for a book making and still a place for local children’s printmaking education. The museum’s curator, for whom I believed the museum was an emotional home, told me that my fresco painting looked as though they had always been there. I was relieved that I had found a permanent home for the image (of my book). I donated the triptych painting to the museum as a part of their permanent collection. Deborah, the curator said “it meant very, very much” to them, and took photos in every step of my installation process with their tiny humble digital camera for their archive.



Deborah (on the right) said good-bye to me and walking away from the Quincy Manual Training School for Boys on the campus of Good Will-Hinckley, now is L.C. Bates Museum, Maine, 2017





- 1) Deborah Staber, the curator of L.C. Bates Museum's basement printshop
- 2) The Printshop of L.C. Bates museum is a still a site for local children's education.
- 3) Collection of curios and animal taxidermy objects at L.C. Bates Museum
- 4) Deborah Staber, the curator of L.C. Bates Museum's basement printshop 2017
- 5) Signing Deed of Gift of the fresco painting triptych, *Anatomy of a "Book."* in Deborah's office, L.C. Bates museum 2017

I should note that I wanted to record the image of the book accurately, yet I did not want to have the word “misery” (from my book title) in a museum that already had a sense of sorrow. Therefore, in the fresco version of my book, I changed the title to *Four of Mattresses Stacked on Mystery* (instead of *Mysery*.)



(top) My studio at Skowhegan, Maine, 2017

(bottom) *Four of Mattresses Stacked on MYSTERY*, 2017 Fresco

In the process of killing my book, as I was slowly preparing for the elimination of the book as a physical object, I’d been working on an Audiobook version of the book as a record of its ephemeral existence. Many artists have participated in reading pages of the book for me, including Rirkrit Tiravanija, Ralph Lemon, Mariel Capanna, Sarah Workneh, and William E. Jones.

What I didn’t know was that some unforeseen coincidences were about to occur in the next step of the project after my return to New York City, following nine weeks of isolation in Skowhegan. One strange coincidence was that I was asked to work for an art book publisher in New York right after my return. I didn’t look for the job; I was literally *asked*. I told the company I am a conceptual-pseudo-bookmaker, whom had taught myself (via YouTube tutorials) *so I did not truly know how to make books* professionally, but they said they would *train* me. The story of the orphans in that damp basement print shop being trained to make books was still on my mind. Therefore, last August 2017, I started training to

make books, learning to bind, cut, fold, stamp, and so on. I eventually advanced beyond being an unpaid apprentice, and now I am a paid bookbinder awaiting my second paycheck.



Working (training) in a publishing house (Dayjob chronicle: a young artist as a book binder), 2017

As I said in the beginning, *coincidence* can be considered the main medium of my work. I also said I would come back to the use of the word “*spy*.” The publisher viewed me as an apprentice bookbinder, but in my mind, I was merely a spy who was trying to become a part of the publishing system.

The book publisher with which I am employed mainly makes art books. When an artist commissions a project, the publisher review the project, calculates the value of the materials and the time and labor involved, and charges the artist—that is, the *client*. This is a simple and straightforward fabrication system.

Though it is still premature to hope this, I am planning to suggest an absurd zero-sum game to the publisher with which I am employed: my plan is to commission the publisher to make my *Four of Mattresses Stacked on Misery*. If they accept my project for their bindery, they will calculate the estimated material and labor costs of the project, and I will pay those costs as a *client*. However, I will also be the *laborer* who will make the book edition and will be paid according to the hours of labor I work on the project. Within this system, I am indeed employed by my own self, not as in my hypothetical system but in terms of real labor that can be measured.



Working (training) in a publishing house, practicing *double-pamphlet* binding (Dayjob chronicle: a young artist as a book binder), 2017

This is why I said I was at the “spy” stage. I currently am trying very hard to be a good, hardworking employee and learn lots of skills quickly from the publisher so that when I reveal my intention to commission my own book, my suggestion will not be offensive, and I will not appear to have fooled the publisher into revealing its system of working. Though I don’t think this will harm the publisher, it’s just absurd and unproductive for the company to be a middleman of my own project.

Of course, I will probably lose more money than I will earn from the labor, making this the aforementioned zero-sum game. There’s also the possibility of the total failure of this project; It may simply ends as an young artist’s *dayjob-fantasy*.

Still, I think this will increase the complexity of my precarious book project on many levels, which include hypothetical employment, labor, working for my future self, and *crafting coincidences*, literal, and conceptually I hope this works, but for now, I am a very hardworking employee—and a spy.

Though I don’t yet have an exhibition venue for presenting this long-term project, I plan to finally launch this book I nearly killed, *Four of Mattresses Stacked on Misery*, along with the documentation and byproducts (object-based sculptures) of the whole process of my subversive employment in publishing. This presentation will be accompanied by the performance series *Afternoon with an Author*, in which I will imitate the archetypal book signing/book reading event with a ventriloquist.



I hope I didn’t bore you too much with my story. Thank you for your time.

Truly,

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