

Art in America

Emilie L. Gossiaux

OBSERVING BY TOUCH, BLIND ARTIST EMILIE L. GOSSIAUX
SCULPTS TATTOOS AND DANCING DOGS

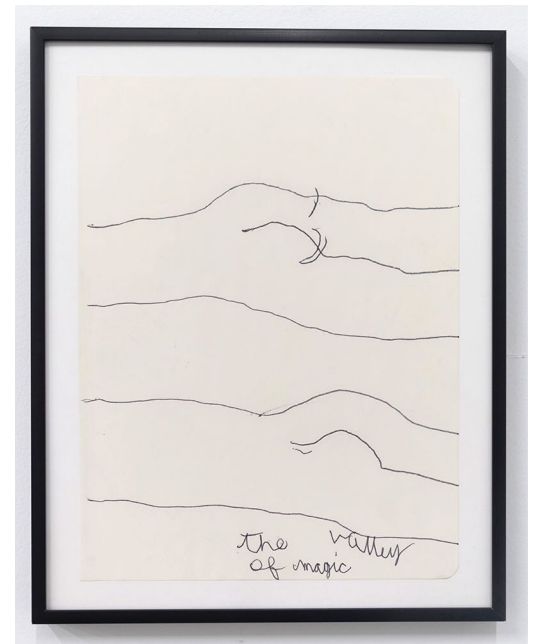
By Emily Watlington, January 2020



From left to right, Emilie L. Gossiaux's *Looking Through the Leaves at Two People Making Out*, 2018, oil paint on bedsheet, 55 by 85 inches; *Blurry Vision (After Making Out)*, 2018, oil paint on drywall, 48 by 72 inches.

Almond and Piggy Pink are two evocative Crayola crayon colors that Emilie L. Gossiaux uses in her drawings. The New Orleans–born, New York–based artist has relied on the memories and sensory experiences these descriptors call to mind ever since she became blind—the result of being hit by an 18-wheeler while riding her bike. At the time of the accident, Gossiaux was

studying art at Cooper Union; last year, she earned her MFA from Yale. At many art schools, blind contour drawing is a classic assignment: students are prompted to look only at the subject in front of them, not at their drawing. Gossiaux adapts this method, using ballpoint pen on newsprint to draw indented outlines that she later fills in with wax crayons, working from memory or observing her subjects by touch.

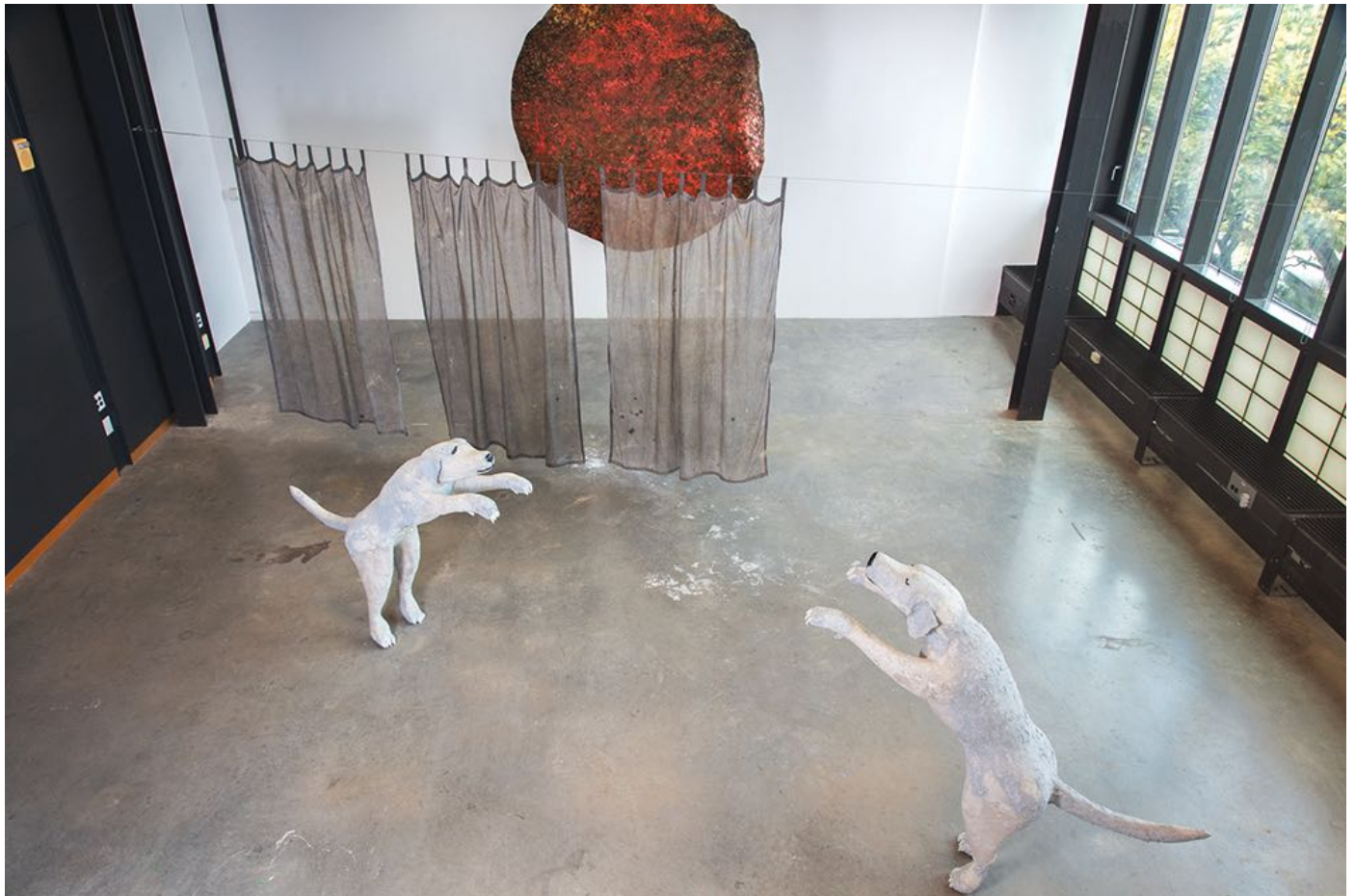


[Emilie L. Gossiaux](#): *The Valley of Magic*, 2018, ink on newsprint, 11½ by 9 1/8 inches.

In addition to making tactile drawings, Gossiaux often uses clay, papier-mâché, and paint on recycled fabric to depict intimate scenes. Her first solo exhibition, “After Image,” at the gallery False Flag in New York last year, addressed emotional bonds and erotic desire with a sweet sort of silliness. “The Valley of Magic” is scribbled on one drawing, which shows the butts of two people lying next to each other. Her painting on found fabric *Looking Through the Leaves at Two People Making Out* (2018)—featuring a naked, necking couple partially concealed by shrubbery—satirizes a widespread ocular fetish for seeing the forbidden.

Gossiaux’s female guide dog, a yellow Labrador Retriever named London, regularly figures in her work. *Dancing with London* (2018), recently shown at Julius Caesar gallery in Chicago in a group exhibition about mutual care between animals and humans, comprises two larger-than-life sculptures of her canine companion. The dog stands on her hind legs, front paws extended as if inviting visitors to dance with her—one way that London expresses affection. The process of making the work was much like petting a pooch:

Gossiaux rubbed paper clay and other materials over polystyrene body forms mounted on aluminum armatures.



Emilie L. Gossiaux: *Dancing with London and Looking at the Sun with Your Eyes Closed*, 2018, mixed mediums, dimensions variable.

Gossiaux also works as an educator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where she leads tours of the permanent collection and co-teaches a drawing class for blind and low-vision visitors. Next fall, she'll be an artist-in-residence with a development company at 3 World Trade Center. This month, for In Practice—an annual open-call exhibition at SculptureCenter—Gossiaux will show works depicting her loved ones' tattoos. To create the pieces, she began by sculpting clay body parts of her dad, her sister, and herself, then carved in their tattoos as she remembers them: her father's forearm is shown bearing E.L.G., his initials as well as those of both his daughters; a chili

pepper adorns her sister's right breast; and the outline of a Paul Klee cat appears on the artist's shoulder. The hollow forms were then filled with black expanding foam that soon seeped out of the sculptural incisions, suggesting that tattoos and other forms of self-expression are like your insides coming out for others to see. Gossiaux's experience of making the sculpture suits the theme of this year's In Practice, which is doubt. After starting them, she realized that some were not exactly true to life. For instance, she had rendered her dad's forearm crucifix upside down. So she began creating entirely fictional tattoos, like palm trees on a neck, reflecting how intimate memories are often more about the feelings they evoke than the accuracy of their details.



Emilie L. Gossiaux: *Outer Space: My Dad's Old Tattoo, Smiley Foot*, 2019, mixed mediums, 9 by 4 by 16 inches.

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By Emily Watlington, January 2020

first look

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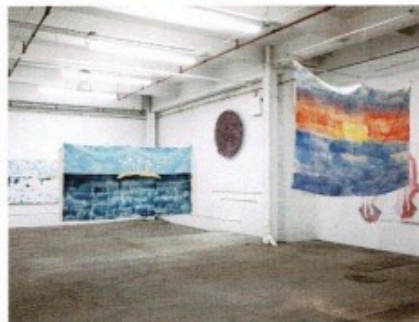
A New York artist's tactile drawings and sculptures evoke intimacy among both humans and animals with a charming playfulness.

by Emily Watlington

ALMOND AND PIGGY PINK ARE TWO evocative Crayola crayon colors that Emilie L. Gossiaux uses in her drawings. The New Orleans-born, New York-based artist has relied on the memories and sensory experiences these descriptors call to mind ever since she became blind – the result of being hit by an 18-wheeler while riding her bike. At the time of the accident, Gossiaux was studying art at Cooper Union; last year, she earned her MFA from Yale. At many art schools, blind contour drawing is a classic assignment: students are prompted to look only at the subject in front of them, not at their drawing. Gossiaux adapts this method, using ballpoint pen on newsprint to draw indented outlines that she later fills in with wax crayons, working from memory or observing her subjects by touch.

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Top left, *Looking Through the Leaves at Two People Making Out*, 2018, oil paint on bedsheet, 55 by 85 inches.

Top right, *Blurry Vision (After Making Out)*, 2018, oil paint on drywall, 48 by 72 inches.

Middle left, *The Valley of Magic*, 2018, ink on newsprint, 11½ by 9¼ inches.

Middle center, *Outer Space: My Dad's Old Tattoo, Smiley Foot*, 2019, mixed mediums, 9 by 4 by 16 inches.

Middle right, *Dancing with London and Looking at the Sun with Your Eyes Closed*, 2018, mixed mediums, dimensions variable.

Bottom left, view of Emilie L. Gossiaux's show "After Image," 2018, at False Flag, New York.

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OPENING THIS MONTH

Works by Emilie L. Gossiaux in the group show "In Practice: Total Disbelief" at SculptureCenter, New York, Jan. 16–Mar. 23, 2020.

THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART

“Total Disbelief”

When this fascinating fifteen-person show opened, pre-pandemic, the derelict car with grayed-out windows parked on the street in front of the SculptureCenter might have been mistaken for a prop from a sci-fi film shoot. When the city was ordered to stay home and spin its wheels, the ghostly untitled piece by Devin Kenny and Andrea Solstad seemed eerily prescient. The eclectic exhibition (whose illustrated catalogue is online while the nonprofit remains temporarily closed) was thoughtfully curated by Kyle Dancewicz, but the title he chose for the show is misleading—its mood, far from one of absolute incredulity, is fraught with false starts and second-guessing. One standout is the New Orleans-born, New York-based Emilie Louise Gossiaux, who became blind as an undergraduate art student and went on to earn an M.F.A. at Yale. The centerpiece of her tenderly witty installation is a display of stoneware arms, legs, chests, and torsos—modelled on those of the artist and her family—marked with tattoos, which she re-created from memory.

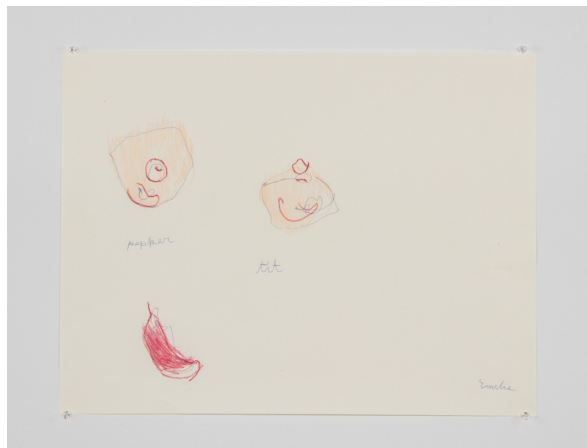
—Andrea K. Scott

What is at stake when doubt is our primary stance toward the world? “In Practice: Total Disbelief” at SculptureCenter stages a position of doubting the contemporary as ideals, norms, and truth-claims continue to be productively revised and perniciously defaced. The 2020 iteration of “In Practice,” an annual open call that facilitates new artistic production, “Total Disbelief” presents wide-ranging works that profess doubt as a simultaneous desire for and refusal of identification. Recalcitrant, skeptical, and courting illegibility, the exhibition’s artists invest their materials with forms and narratives that disobey as a precondition for knowing.

Several artworks draw on bodily knowledge to cast doubt on the legacy of patriarchal Enlightenment values that excise what our nonconforming bodies understand. In Laurie Kang’s *Hull* (2019–20), photographs of the artist’s grandmother’s garden and photo paper exposed to the contingencies of atmosphere and light are folded into flesh-toned silicone rolls, forging matrilineal intimacies across ecologies that emerge from and return to bodily inheritances. **To construct E.L.G. Family Archives (2019), Emilie Louise Gossiaux inscribed ceramic body parts with the tattoos shared by the artist and her family, blurring the boundary between anonymity and identifying markings and doing so through the recall of memory many years after the artist became blind.**

Videos by Andrew Norman Wilson, Jordan Strafer, Qais Assali, and Jesse Chun merge documentary formats with parafictional narratives through audiovisual montages that enact skepticism and ironic distancing. The recursive courtroom testimony of the washed-up doll protagonist in Jordan Strafer’s *PEP* (Process Entanglement Procedure) (2019) confounds the melodramatic scripts of victimhood through which performances are evaluated and credibility is juridically determined. In these videos, the fragile division between knowledge and doubt is the result of bureaucratic authority — sometimes humorous, though likely threatening.

A highlight is Hadi Fallahpisheh’s *blind spot*, an imaginative installation of photographic drawings and sculptures that perform graphic reduction to the garish simplicity of stereotypes. *Sand Monkey* (2019), a stack of sand-covered urns that dons a monkey mask and has a broom and mop for arms, restages and parodies the psychological and cultural mechanisms that project racialized associations and classed assumptions. Fallahpisheh’s title, which suggests being at once within and outside of the enclosures of visibility, stands in for the freedoms and dangers that doubt holds in tension throughout “Total Disbelief.” Yet the exhibition’s claims of doubt reveal another blind spot: amid our age of doubt, what is left for us to believe in?



OBSERVER

By David D'Arcy, January 17, 2020

At the Cutting Edge of Sculpture, Artists Test the Limits of Belief

In the brick-lined basement of SculptureCenter in Long Island City, Queens, you'll find Andrew Cannon's Gertrude Fireplace, in simulated brick, a replica of a massive structure designed for Gertrude Vanderbilt's studio in what is now the studio school in Greenwich Village. Affixed to the faux-bricks are white flame forms that ascend like tufts of smoke. Curator Kyle Dancewicz called the work a "representation" of the larger original fireplace, a construction that evokes the ghost stories and spiritualism of the early twentieth century, when it was made. Think of a poster for a horror film, in three dimensions.

That's about as close as the works in SculptureCenter's annual "In Practice" exhibition, on view through March 23, get to conventional sculpture in this year's iteration, called "Total Disbelief," and it isn't close. Which is fine with Christian Rattemeyer, formerly of MoMA's drawings department, who took over as director in November.

"The idea is to capture a commonality of conversation among the next generation of artists that allows us to get a glimpse at the questions that artists will be asking over the next five years," he explains of the concept behind the regularly occurring exhibition that commissions work from emerging artists. "What are the materials they're interested in? What are the vocabularies?" said Rattemeyer.

He asks visitors viewing the work of 13 artists and artist teams to "think of this as the absolute front line of art in three dimensions, the sharp tip of the spear as it moves forward in time."

A spear is one of the few objects not included in the exhibition, but there are body parts said to be modeled after those of an artist and her family, formed and painted to seem sawed apart. E.L.G. Familial Archives by Emilie Louise Gossiaux conjures up the cartoonish later figurative work of Philip Guston and the contents of Jeffrey Dahmer's freezer. Laid out on a table, the display reconfigures the traditional family portrait.

The selection for "In Practice," now in its 19th year, was made from some 800 applicants, Christian Rattemeyer noted. "Every iteration has less weight on its shoulders to get it right, and it's more about making sure that we don't play it safe."

NON-PROFIT CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE SCULPTURECENTER'S WINTER PROGRAMMING: TWO SHOWS THAT EXPLORE DISBELIEF AND REFERENCE THE INSTITUTION'S PAST

SculptureCenter has had many locations and transformations in its time, but has always made an incomparable impact on the NYC arts community. Originally founded in 1928, as The Clay Club by sculptor Dorothea Denslow, its intention has always been focused on artists both established and emerging that refuse to play it safe. In 2001, the organization purchased a former trolley repair shop in New York's Long Island City, and it was renovated into their current exhibition space.

Now overseen by director Christian Rattemeyer (former associate curator at MoMA's drawings department), the institution is currently showing two winter exhibitions: *Rafael Domenech: Model to exhaust this place* and the group show, *In Practice: Total Disbelief*. Running concurrently, these exhibitions work in concert together and are comprised of newly commissioned works by the non-collecting museum. These shows push the boundaries of reality and standards while exploring memory and the possibilities for change. In both cases, the work presented is intrinsic to the space, provided a breeding ground for innovation.

Since 2003, *In Practice* has remained a highly anticipated annual show and is often viewed as a place to chart the work of emerging artists. *In Practice* has supported nearly 200 artists with the essential resources of space, funding, time, and administrative support. This year's program was curated by Kyle Dancewicz, SculptureCenter's director of exhibitions and programs. Dancewicz breaks down the selection process and tells us that every spring they start an open call to artists. "We get about 800 applications annually," he says, "and go through a long process of narrowing down to ultimately 10 to 15 artists. It's often artists' first engagement with a commissioning institution, with a non-profit institution, or with showing in New York galleries."

Introducing the first work in the show, Dancewicz highlights Devin Kenny and Andrea Solstad's piece "Untitled (Purves Sr.)" in which a 33-year-old Chevy Montecarlo has been parked outside the space, and "has been treated to make it look like about 1,000 years old and covered in dust." The piece will remain outside for as long as possible into the exhibition run, as Dancewicz says, "It will be there as long as we can afford to pay for tickets, basically."

Another standout work is Emilie Louise Gossiaux's "E.L.G Familial Archives (Outerspace)." After the artist lost her sight 10 years ago, she developed an adaptive practice for drawing and sculpting. These ceramic sculptures and drawings are made from the artist's memory of tattoos on parts of her body and the bodies of her family members. Dancewicz says, "These are sort of surrealist sculptures but also work haptically and with memory to make an archive of body parts that connect her family. There is a lot of humor in them too."



Exploring how outer structure shapes inner structure

By proximity, extension and definition, the atmosphere art is created in can't help but become part of it.

Presented by SculptureCenter in Long Island City, Cuban artist Rafael Domenech's "Model to exhaust this place" merges his sculpture with the gallery's ground floor, the site of a former trolley repair shop. With a strong focus on how physical dimensions affect the people living in them, Domenech uses construction site materials to powerful effect, creating a stripped-down, metal-heavy atmosphere that's somber but also welcoming.

Domenech's architectural installation is a sculpture, pavilion, meeting venue and decentered architectural model working in concert with an intact though largely unused industrial gantry system. Reflective of LIC itself, the urban setting created delivers a universal message applicable across all geographical areas: The physical specs of what we're close to become part of who we are.

Emphasizing the interplay between a repurposed industrial, early 20th-century space and its reincarnation as a gallery, Domenech uses panels of semi-iridescent framed aluminum mesh to create what he calls "space modulators," creating different perceptual experiences with added architectural elements that SculptureCenter Director Christian Rattemeyer says, "replicate standards set by the construction industry."

Meant to showcase a book as a unit, large-scale, the panels display writing by the artist and exiled Cuban poet, novelist, essayist and critic Severo Sarduy. Quotes in bold red font printed on narrow pale wooden chairs underscore just how much the physical presentation of literary material can modify the perception of it.

The theme of "Model to exhaust this place" centers around how widely used measurements and metrics inform and function as the literal building blocks for people's experiences, and understanding of the world around them — a sort of metrics matrix. Rattemeyer confirms the observation that all people are unavoidably shaped by structures and standardized precedents.

SculptureCenter's other new exhibit, "In Practice: Total Disbelief," featuring works by 13 newly commissioned artists and artist teams, shows how accepted truths and social norms are constructed and questioned as well as how they're questioned. The exhibit delves deeply into and deconstructs the nature and structure of disbelief itself, whether the disbelief is in response to conflicting information that doesn't add up, or comes from the experience of how faith can sour into suspicion when the believer is given reasons to stop believing.

Jordan Strafer's "Process Entanglement Procedure (PEP), 2019" features a video of a woman represented by a doll in a courtroom of dolls responding to a demeaning interrogation by unseen opposing counsel. The contempt in the voice, even as a nonvisual presence, calls attention to how disbelief can become an abusive force as the quest for justice can be carried out abusively and unjustly: how skepticism can protect, but also harm.

An autopsy-esque treatment of memories and loss by Emilie Louise Gossiaux, "ELG Familial Archives 2019," features literally truncated recollections through body parts — among them the breasts, ribcage, tattooed forearms and ears of family members as well as the artist's own. Gossiaux, who lost her vision while an art student, created the pieces from memory using foam, stoneware and paint. The forensic quality of limbs laid out on a table — Gossiaux's arm bearing a butterfly tattoo next to her father's branded with a crucifix — amplifies the display's stunning power.

"What artists do best is look at things a different way and through their perspective, make us look anew," says Rattemeyer.

No question.