

R E M E D I A L



W O R K S



REMEDIAL

Remedial Works takes as its starting point the idea that human bodies in contemporary global societies are now placed within a dense ecology of materials, surfaces, objects and substances, that can be equally poisonous or reparative. While recognising that we live as part of systems of industrial production and consumption—usually inescapable for single individuals—the exhibition asks in light of this, what possibility still exists for remediation and healing?

Whispering Pines is a video series by Shana Moulton which follows her alter ego, a hypochondriac named Cynthia, on her quest to find perfect health and happiness. Cynthia takes the promises of new age, beauty and consumer products to their logical conclusions, reframing pharmaceuticals, medical devices, probiotic food and make up pads—amongst other things—as mythical and magical objects able to render the body and mind stable and well.

Cynthia is used as an example to describe a contemporary subject—or market—which has emerged alongside the invention of the ‘wellness’ industry, a product and service category which sits somewhere between the medical and beauty industries and which doesn’t seek to remedy illness but rather looks to optimise health and something more vague, referred to as ‘well-being.’

WORKS

The implication of such an industry is that there is always room for improvement and that bodies, even while not sick, are never truly well. Moulton’s videos draw out the absurdity of this, demonstrating that the endpoint of such thinking is not necessarily that we are promised perfectly functioning bodies, but more that we desire to escape or transcend bodies themselves.

Here scientific pursuit and spirituality become confused, as the treatment of a bout of irritable bowel syndrome or fibromyalgia becomes an opportunity for Cynthia’s body to become stripped away completely, leaving her weightless, invisible, a clay lump of energy sitting in a calm perpetual stasis. Wellness is recast as an epic narrative, alluded to by a refrain in one film, ‘constant craving has always been.’¹

Weightlessness is also a motif used by Sophie Cassar in her work, however she is quick to remind us of “Weightlessness as an idealised and aestheticised end-point for sick girls to reach, but *you can’t overthrow capitalism on an empty stomach.*”² In her work *Plaster the Body with Disney*, she repurposes helium foil balloons which are often found in hospital stores as gift alternatives for patients whose immune systems are too suppressed to receive flowers.

She employs an almost adolescent strategy of customisation, mummifying the thin shiny surfaces of the balloons in collectible stickers, an act that thickens the skin of the balloons, adds weight to them and makes the objects somehow more corporeal. Cassar’s work stems from her experiences with childhood cancer and serious hospitalisation, but as well as being autobiographical it is also concerned with representations of sick women and girls online and in popular culture.

Accustomed to often having worked in bouts between treatments from her sickbed, Cassar employs a collage-like practice to her artist books and films to explore the agency of sick women and girls through the lens of ‘cute.’ While cuteness is commonly mistaken as an infantilising aesthetic, absent of power and tied to consumption, Cassar uses it to devastating effect. She demonstrates the power of cute to both reclaim subjectivity and physical territory as well as the ability of cute to speak critically of death and desire in deeply meaningful ways.

The Lithuanian duo Pakui Hardware is concerned with the connection between materials and the economy and how the body is being reshaped through technology. Their sculptural works *On Demand* appropriate NASA satellite footage of the surface of Mars, which they have then reshaped into organic and anthropomorphic forms. The surfaces collapse macro and micro viewpoints, simultaneously resembling organs or the skin of a body as well as strange planetary landscapes. They are reminiscent of both laboratory microscopy imaging and the photography used by mining prospectors, suggesting that both distant planets and the genome are frontiers for the extraction of commodities and value under capitalism.

A mundane science fiction³ is also invoked in Anicka Yi's 3D film *The Flavor Genome*, which follows the journey of a flavour scientist into the Amazon in search of a legendary and rare shape-shifting orchid said to have exceptional psychotropic qualities. In this film Yi explores the chemical basis of flavour perception and speaks of how new essences can be synthesised from nature. Rather than seeing this merely as the introduction of possible new experiences for consumption, Yi explores it as a possibility for the emergence of a post-human consciousness.

With perception extended and reassigned in new ways, a human-animal-plant hybrid consciousness is hypothetically made possible and bodies and land are again conflated. But here this is further problematised as the legacy of the Amazon as a site of pharmaceutical and gastronomical colonisation is made inseparable from our very consciousnesses.

An imaginary microcosmic dreamscape is built by Jess Tan in her work *recurring dream (silent reading time)*, a slippery assemblage which manages to allude to bodies, a landscape and emotions all at once. This layered installation work is constructed from an ecology of materials widely abundant in contemporary global cities; glitter, bouncy balls, fake flowers, Plastimake, sunglass lenses, foam, denim, aromatherapy oils, chocolate pebbles, fake crystals, hair and so on.

Tan often strips away the intended use value of objects and materials, opting to explore the physical properties of objects at surface value, then recombining these materials in novel ways equally beautiful and abject, provisional and finely crafted. In a similar vein to Sophie Cassar, objects are repurposed and collaged and a

personal territory (subjective and physical) is constructed. Tan's work suggests a grounding escape to an inner sanctum, a place of repose or calm, where the objects become thoughts and emotions divided, contained and kept stable, yet somehow still mysterious. In a way the work operates as a portrait of a body, but it is also an exploration of what we are drawn to and how we read meaning—escapist fantasies in particular—into things and their combinations.

Many of the artists in *Remedial Works* are showing works that transition from one realm to another – or rather sit with one foot in both. Whether this is science and spirituality, sickness and wellness, earth and body, lucidity and dream, many of the works seem to play with transitions between states of perception. This is engaged with most directly, however, by Clare Milledge, whose practice has for many years worked with the idea of the artist-shaman, or the idea of an artist working as a conduit between visible and invisible worlds.

Milledge presents materially dense and expansive and intentionally open-ended installation works that are used to present visionary possibilities, offering to audiences a 'gift of sight.' In her work, materials are used as psychomagic⁴ tools to allow this transference between artist and audience to occur. Her work *Strigiformes: Binocular, Binaural* combines data about bird populations, Tinder, expansive painting and performance to create a ritualistic event, intentionally left ambiguous to invite the audience to read themselves into the work. In doing so Milledge draws a connection between material and the theatrical act as a potential psychologically reparative process.⁵

Andrew Varano, 2017

- 1 A lyric from the k.d. lang song 'Constant Craving' (1992), which features in Shana Moulton's video 'MindPlace ThoughtStream' (2014).
- 2 Sophie Cassar 'The Surgery was a Success and the Patient is Dead' (2016), available online: <http://2016.nextwave.org.au/essays/the-surgery-was-a-success/>
- 3 In this sense mundane science fiction in brief refers to a subtype of science fiction which describes a technological future which is technically possible and may soon be realised. As such these narratives describe real possible futures or alternatives for the current world rather than escapist fantasies.
- 4 Milledge is influenced by the filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky who speaks of psychomagic as a ritualistic tool which combines object and theatre to create psychological change within a participant.
- 5 For *Remedial Works* you are invited to stream a recording of Clare Milledge's performance directly to your smart phone or device (www.strigiformes.video).











Oversharing as a strategy for overcoming states of nervousness.

Health sandals, reality TV addiction, giant quail excreting turquoise paint at a public pool in my dream, making out with a teaspoon of yoghurt, carbonated non-alcoholic drink to increase my livelihood, digimon as a pet, peak hour traffic from my bedroom window every day, mums spinach green long sleeve polo shirt with coral bleach stains that she wore for 12 years and still owns, exercise pants stretched over a coat hanger in winter-time increases drying time, colour code everything, plush everything to compensate for loneliness, collecting my dead skin and hair in a recycled yoghurt tub, cleaning tax, refreshing inbox in intervals of 10 minutes, interior decorating like I'm playing the sims, bears as containers, teddy bear culture, track pants passed down through two generations, homeopathy, breakfast chocolate addiction, cold sweat, fear of missing out, bubblegum flavoured lip smacker mashed into the carpet in the study, sock activated blue berries, activated blueberries that taste like lip smacker, blue berry lip smacker mashed into the carpet whilst hiding under the table, blue berry flavoured lip smacker that tastes like blueberries before I've tasted actual blueberries in my then-short life-span, urban spirituality, responding when someone calls me by the wrong name without correcting them,

circulation socks blown away in a storm, looking out the window in spring at the weeds blossoming and substituting my face in to the equation, elevated limb for 3 months, tower silos, more than one abandoned lawn mower along the train track, de-shelling peanuts whilst staring out the window at the rain in the winter school holidays from year 8 to 10, word document as therapy, hairy bumblebee stomachs, romanticising Mars (the planet), wishful thinking, people phobia, understanding things in slow motion, daylight robbery, monopoly man I R L, discoloured foot, extremely comprehensive B,B,Q, GINGKO 6,0,0,0, clean cut pony tail, wetlook denim, adrenaline junkie, eating dried figs before I ever ate a fresh fig, saline (is the) (universal) solution, hiding when someone rings the doorbell, my teeth are getting in the way of the words I pronounce, imagining survivor the television show politics translating to real life, sometimes when I walk home I feel like I'm walking on a treadmill, going nowhere,

left unchecked, this personality type may start to lose touch, withdrawing into 'hermit mode'. this will require a great deal of energy from friends and family to help return this person to the 'real world'.

one re sat ones briggs-myers test and ones results have varied. one can't tell whether it's a true depiction of how ones personality type has developed forward slash adapted forward slash morphed or whether one has subconsciously become more tactical in the answers that one opts for, attempting to change something which seems like it is a result of absorbing information since 1991.

dear dolly doctor, why is my body changing?

white hairs located on the border of ones hair line. they have earned their place thru persistent re growth.

one is sitting in the dark, in a 30 year old bamboo wicker chair padded with pillows that have taken the mould of ones mothers sitting position. one is eating leftover cold rice – it is strange to be unable to see what you are ingesting. everyone in ones environment is snoring. one thinks one can smell the sea in the air, a truly s-s-s-sensory experience of dining alone.

have u seen the moon tonite? it's full and orange and close to the ground, like a huge inflated exercise ball. where one lives, the moon is a tiny saggy white excess hanging from the sky, a tear drop. Salty!!!!

the direction one was taking with ones planned response was unclear, but one had already begun to speak. ones words became convoluted, ones brain detaching from words that one was producing. one searched for a quick escape, realising that one had drastically diverged from ones starting point. it was becoming apparent to others, perhaps the intentions to have clarity weren't there in the first place. when u twirl the handle of a mop so that the mop head expands into a star shape and it covers more surface area of the floor. I lurve it!!!!

emotionally unavailable today, please call back later.

I emerge from a glitch in time. I want to unzip my skin and run away. I do not imagine that my tears are compromised of complete sadness. There are some tears that pour out of my eyes and diverge to meet with riverbeds, opening up to the sea and producing musical notes.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

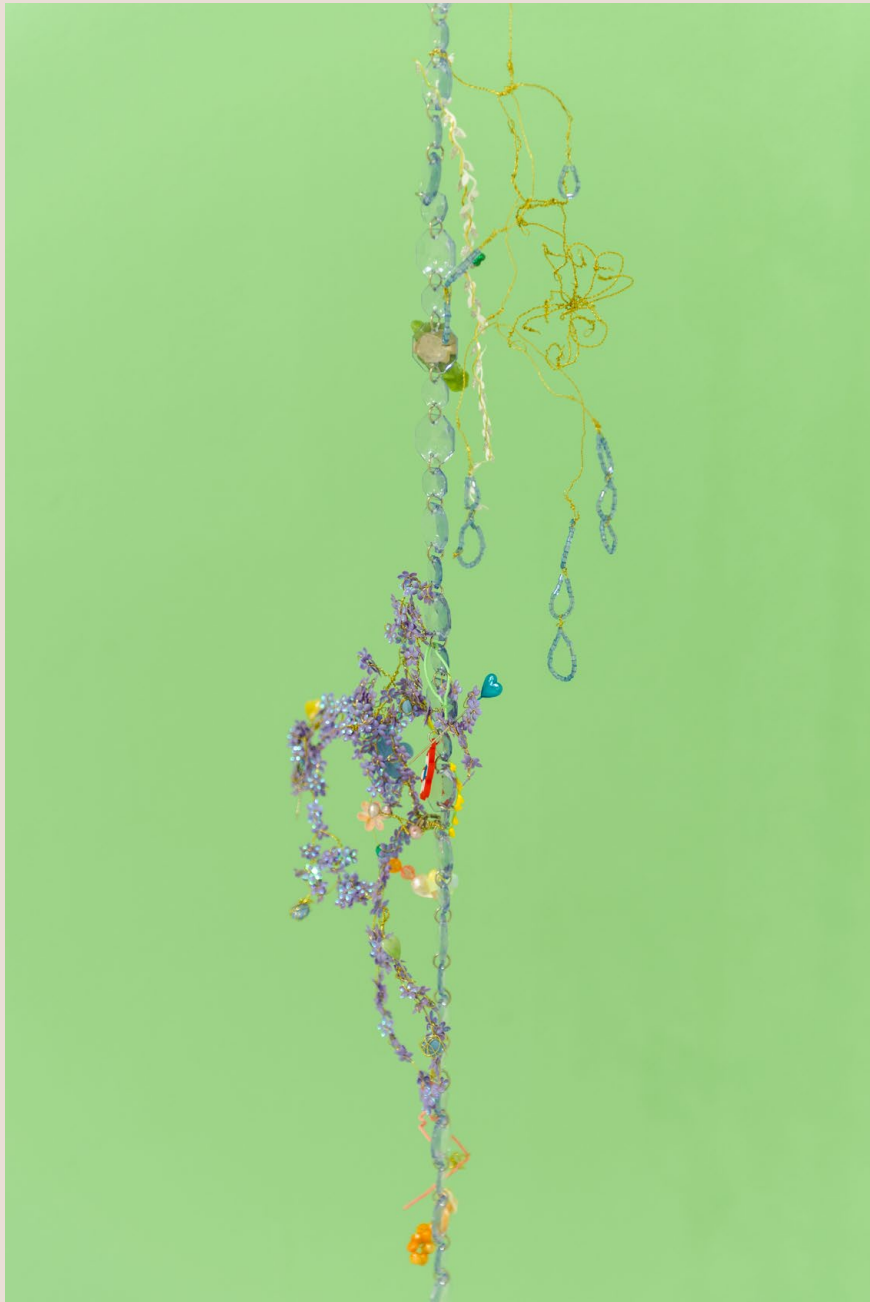
My alarm is set for intervals of five minutes, 24 hours of the day.

When I sleep, crystals begin to form on my skin, conspiring with each other to encase my body. If I sleep for more than 48 hours I will be preserved 4eva. Maybe I'm being superstitious but pretty sure I will melt into the mattress and be preserved within it for infinity of infinity symbol.









P S A: If u try to change the weather when ur in a bad mood and u have not fulfilled many of ur short or long term life aspirations, the inverse result will occur. I tried to make it sunny all the time but it became a snowstorm that rained fireballs, and then I caught on fire and died. My housemate was mourning my death at my tombstone in the exact spot where I died, outside by the pond I used to fish at and collect salmon to add to the stock in my refrigerator, when they also caught alight and died. It costs 1,0,0,0,0 simoleons each to resurrect us, and this can be done by calling the grim reaper from a small stone surrounded by flames resting on a stone plinth. Once I was resurrected for a fee of less than 1,0,0,0,0 simoleons and I was reincarnated as a zombie. returning from the hellmouth, my body odour wouldn't leave me alone and I had lost my personality,

sometimes honest answers can be revealed if you ask someone lots of questions whilst they are in the light stages of sleep,

polly pocket hotel with slaters riding up and down in the hotel lift that is tulip shaped with glitter, whilst my sister and i make secret potions in the garden out of lemon leaves, guava leaves, water from the hose and instruments taken from the sandpit in our backyard. pretending we are witches, she feeds me teaspoons of our concoctions, it feels transformative,

text for recurring dream (silent reading time) read by bubbles computer voice whilst drinking bubbles, 11/11/17 my face is a hydalite dissolving in a glass of water,

Jess Tan, 2k17

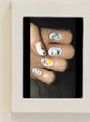
EXCERPT FROM THE SURGERY WAS A SUCCESS AND THE PATIENT IS DEAD

Originally published by Next Wave Festival in 2016



"My graft is like an eye shadow palette with colours swatched from an opal october birthstone. Blue-grey-beige where grafted skin patches over tissue lifted from a donor site with an intact blood supply. Glints and flecks of peach and lilac to cover complex wounds in limb-salvage surgery. The malleability of muscle allows it to effectively obliterate dead space, while the dense capillary network facilitates antibiotic deposition¹. Finally the graft is encased in a baby pink scar. Accessorise the minced meat flesh with Hello Kitty bandaids and wash clean with Primrose antiseptic hand wash to help the sick girl prepare for hostile wound environments. These are images that support claiming disability as accessory, claiming illness as sick-girl-aesthetic."

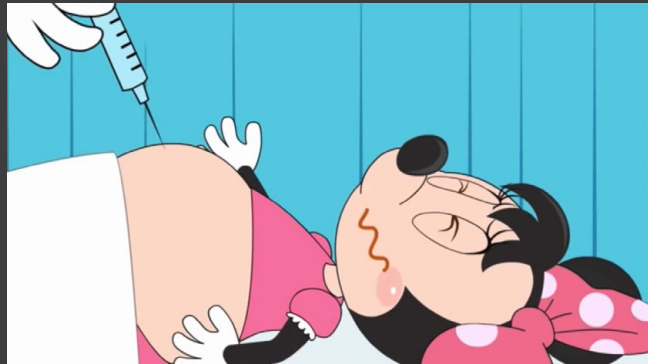
¹ Klebuc, M., & Menn, Z. (2013). Muscle Flaps and Their Role in Limb Salvage. *Methodist DeBakey Cardiovascular Journal*, 9(2), 95-99.

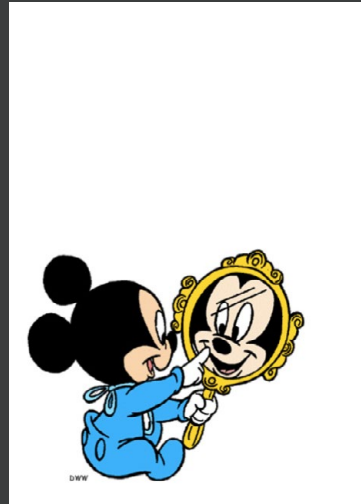












SIT ON ME, SAID THE ROCK, AND I'LL SPEAK

For the mind, everything is in the future; for the heart, everything is in the past.

— Andrey Platonov

It's the future and archeology is an extreme sport. Landmines, landslides, earthquakes, garbage ossuaries, shopping mall dolmens, bellicose survivalists, sewage geysers, wet-wipe formations and mutant wombats are just a few of the obstacles facing competitors. The rules are simple: players—all sponsored and PhD'd—are each assigned a patch of troubled earth to carry out their competitive fieldwork. Points are awarded for methods in excavation; the type and variety of objects unearthed; the ability of the player to reconstruct a compelling story from the pieces. It's a gruelling, painstaking and perilous game. There are casualties. Bodies cave in, minds sink into madness. All those who watch know what the players must feel: the past is a reluctant, unreliable and irascible beast of the present.

Archeology was Freud's preferred metaphor for his invented profession. This makes sense since both the analyst and archeologist work to animate ruins. As he wrote in 1937, both disciplines have an "undisputed right to reconstruct by means of supplementing and combining the surviving remains. Both of them, moreover, are subject to many of the same difficulties and sources of error." To work with the scraps and rubble of the past—whether buried in the mind or in the mud—is to tell a story in reverse. You arrive home after a long day at work only to discover that you are both already at home and still at work. As Freud observed, the destruction of Pompeii began with its discovery. This is how we reconstruct the present: arriving at ourselves through the cobbled together remains of what was once—but also never was—a recognisable life.

What structures are we building from the ruins at our disposal? Sometimes they are more artifice than edifice. Sometimes they seem completely determined by others. Things always go wrong, breakdown, need to be fixed, can't be fixed. Inside it can be damp and cold, messy and loud, hot and sticky. Surfaces are uneven, it's crowded, there's nowhere to sleep, the toilet doesn't flush, someone keeps using your toothbrush. The poor—out in the open in more ways than one—are forced to build with an inventiveness born of necessity, and are always being shoved along to elsewhere. The well-off pay others to build, clean and protect their structures, but no matter how high or spotless or spacious or secure or light-filled these places become they are never immune to ruination. If the debris of the past reminds us of anything it is that it all begins on the ground, with a single brick or stone or slab, and will someday return there. As the weather makes clear, this can take less than a day.

Using the past as a material for the present requires speculation and speculation requires time—the greatest and rarest of commodities. Time allows us to conceive of what we once were in order to know who we are (a task fraught with error and delusion). There are many things that ask us for our time—sleep, jobs, family, friends, emails, bills, dirty dishes, toenails—but something odd happens when we allocate time to unneeded things. When we concentrate on objects that have been disposed of or forgotten—objects that in themselves hold a more complex or confusing kind of temporality—we enter into a different time. The fabric changes. This time can be fat, unsteady, unproductive, full of potential. Children—archeologists of their own pockets—excel at this kind of time. Occasionally, artists manage to build it into their work.

Who hasn't willed an object to life in one way or another? Hasn't mourned a broken inanimate thing as if it had just died? Hasn't sat on a rock and wished it would speak? Recently, a 250-year-old pretzel was found along the banks of the Danube river in the German city of Regensburg. The pretzel (now a black, nondescript lump) survived because it was originally burnt in the baking process. A scrap can, at any moment, transform into a relic; become a talkative object of virtue. This isn't a Duchampian trick (turning non-art into art) but more of an awakening. Not unlike magic, an object suddenly begins to tell a story in reverse.

Is it impossible to force an object to say the same thing to me and to you? Is it impossible for an object to say the same thing for 10,000 years? In 2004, the U.S

Department of Energy assembled a team of anthropologists, linguists, engineers, scientists and sci-fi writers to brainstorm designs for a series warning monuments. These monuments will eventually be placed at the Waste Isolation Plant (WIPP), an underground chamber containing highly toxic, radioactive transuranic waste, located near Carlsbad, New Mexico. The waste, buried 2,150 ft (655.32 m) below the surface, is a byproduct of the United States nuclear defence program. In 2029 the chamber will be full, and these dangerously toxic materials will need to remain undisturbed for ten centuries. The monuments, made of granite and standing at 25 ft (7.62 m), must therefore deter all future archeologists, alien explorers and any other curious beings from digging or drilling into a catastrophe. As such, the design of these monoliths must consider changes to climate, language and the way in which objects and images will be interpreted into the long future.

Something odd, though. Along with the written warnings in multiple languages, emojis and conventional keep out signs, a graphic outline of Edvard Munch's *Der Schrei der Natur* (The Scream of Nature) was included in the proposal, to be engraved into the granite. Munch, who sensed "a scream passing through nature" and painted it, could not have foreseen this tormented figure, with a bean-like head and warped body, standing watch over America's radioactive debris. There is something both unlikely and tragically prophetic about this figure being employed for such a task. Despite their best intentions, it is surely more of a prisoner than a guard? Its future is grim; imprisoned by a catastrophic scenario. But then again, what other fate is there for an embodied scream?

Walter Benjamin's reading of Paul Klee's peculiar *Angelus Novus* (1920) as the angel of history comes to mind. Facing the past, Benjamin imagined the angel being blown forward by a storm into the future: "Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it before his feet." Are Munch's and Benjamin's figures not somehow united by the WIPP project? One blown backwards into the future by a storm, not knowing where it's going, bumps into the other, who, fixed in place, is unable to do anything but let out a silent howl. And what would the angel say, before being swept along by the winds of progress? There would be no time for a detailed critique of capitalism. More like: "Good luck..." or "Excuse me..." or "Do you have any water?"

To imagine a coming relic is to imagine, and create, a future. This is one way to build a recognisable and liveable structure out of the debris. A structure of and for speculation. I'm writing this in a busy public library in London. I like it here. It may be because I'm writing this with a particular mind in mind. I have been trying to think about the way the artist who I have in mind works; an artist deeply invested in textures and forms, animals and minerals, decay and troubled histories. I have been trying to think about how this artist makes objects that are an antidote to the overblown optimism of the tech-industry and the feckless and fashionable nihilism that is everywhere. We live between this air-headed optimism and scripted cynicism. Both shrink the space and time for thinking and making. This particular artist I have in mind, my friend, reminds us of the apotropaic potential of objects to expand space and time. As relics, they refuse the easiness of today's cynical art object in favour of a different set of relationships. Her objects share an affinity with that very old pretzel. As objects, they carry an ancient sensibility, suggesting a different kind of time, their own archeological future, a story in reverse. Today we are all angels of history, so we better get used to moving backwards.

Tom Melick, 2015

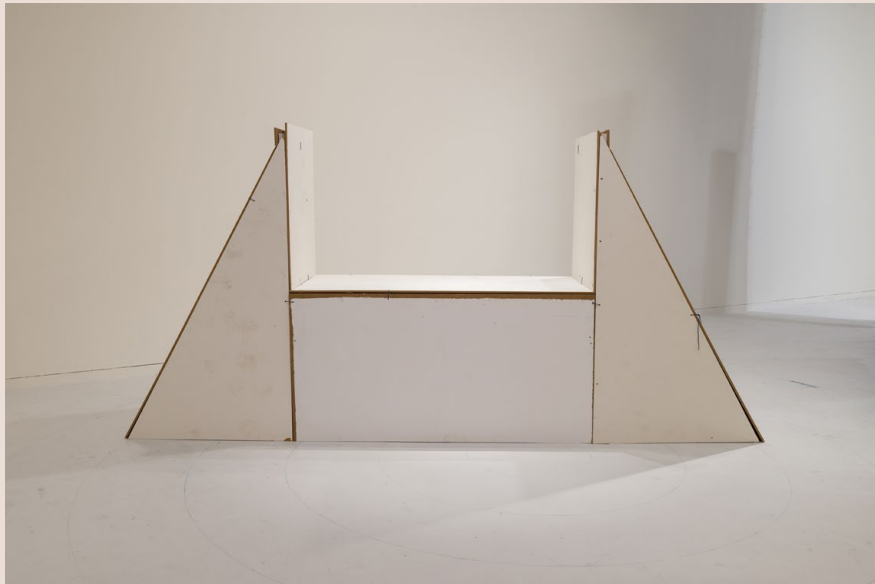












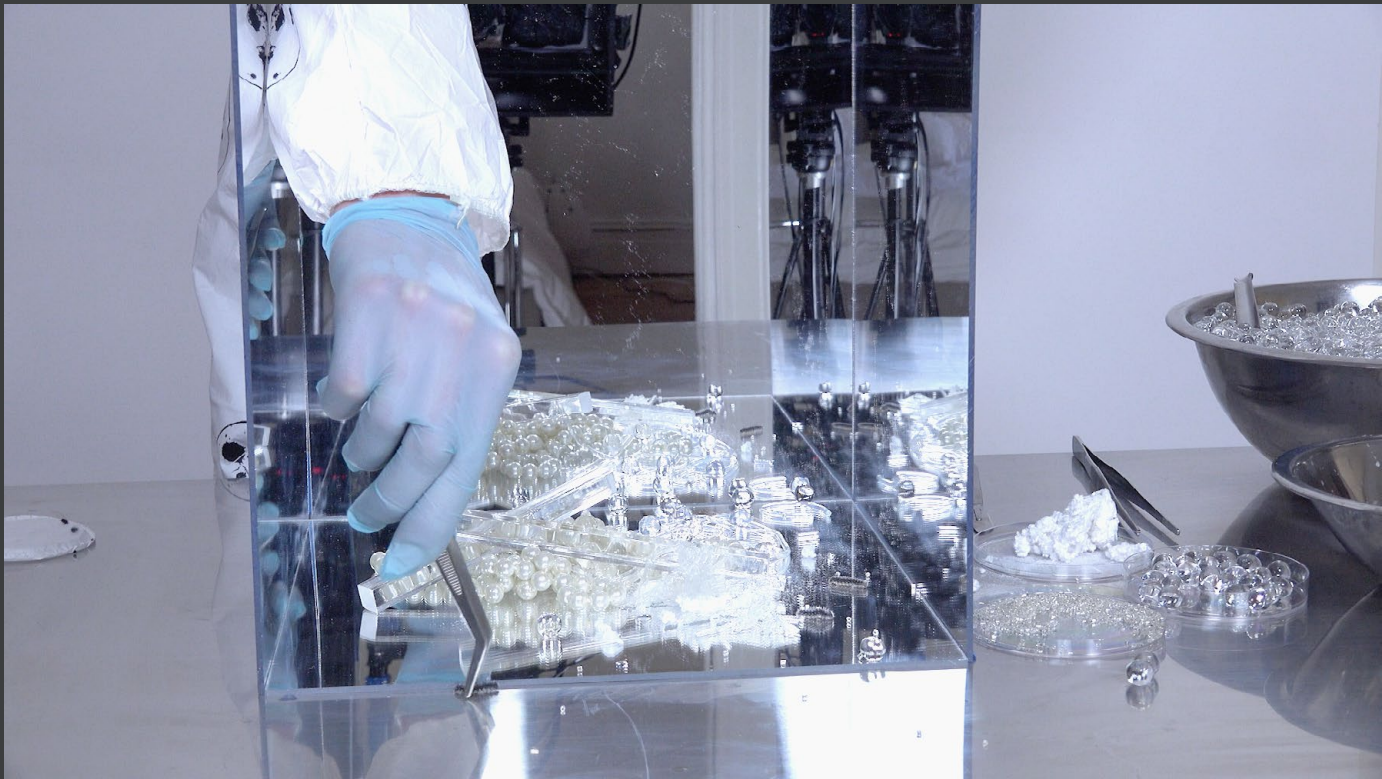












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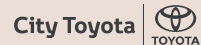
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