

RITUALS

EZRA BENUS

ROMILY ALICE WALDEN

YO-YO LIN

THE LAURIE M. TISCH GALLERY
ON VIEW FEBRUARY 25-APRIL 13

*Rituals is presented in partnership with
ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York.*

12TH ANNUAL
ReelAbilities
FILM FESTIVAL
NEW YORK

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RITUALS

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The Laurie M. Tisch Gallery

On View February 25 - April 13, 2020

Ritual binds people across time and space, building norms that cultivate personal and collective meaning and structure. Akin to this, rituals captured through experiences of disability and illness create temporalities of time and space that are flexible and fluctuating, not easily defined by static structures designed without disabled and sick people in mind. The artists in this exhibition reconfigure what constitutes and marks the mundaneness of the everyday through ritual, tapping into embodiments of living with illness and disability to create a never-ending flow of curiosity and contemplation. Through abstraction, the artists claim space, mark time, and present expansive ways of understanding illness and disability. These configurations of disability maintain bodily knowledge as vital to a rumination on the corporeal and our existence in an interdependent world. In the artists' own formulations of sick and disabled aesthetics, time, and space, this exhibition showcases different ways illness and disability have connective and ritual potential.

Listening to our bodies and their needs in all their sick and disabled glory opens opportunity for honoring and caring for the body/mind and for others, insisting on bodily knowledge and care as invaluable in the continued effort toward building understanding and an equitable society.

The artists articulate the complexity of exhaustively living with chronic pain, navigating care systems, and reckoning with relationships to self and to others through demarcations of patterning, flickering, shading, scattering, jolting, and reflecting. The range of works presented are linked to the enduring legacy of exercising rituals to hold meaning and structure for living in a complex and chaotic world.

Curated by Ezra Benus.

Rituals is presented in partnership with ReelAbilities: New York Film Festival.

Ezra Benus is an artist, educator, and curator who addresses a range of themes—such as time, care, pain, and illness/health—in his art by drawing on his background and experience in Jewish studies, art history, and embodiment of disability. Benus engages the Self as a site where social, political, and spiritual forces collide through tapping into bodily knowledge and social constructions around values of normativity. He has presented works at The 8th Floor, Flux Factory, NYU Gallatin Galleries, and Dedalus Foundation. He was a guest curator at Gibney Dance and a lecturer and consultant at spaces such as Red Bull Arts in Detroit, Hunter College Art Galleries, Eyebeam, SUNY Purchase, CUE Art Foundation, York College, and Princeton University. Benus was an Erich Fromm Fellow at Paideia Institute in Stockholm and the first Access and Adult Learning Fellow in the education department at the Brooklyn Museum.

Artist Statement: Rendering disability and sickness as aesthetic markers, my work takes on forms of visualizing some of the invisibilized aspects of disability identity/experience. The work is steeped in rituals of living with chronic illness, and in the implications of a medicalized embodiment and personal identification and social reality of disability. My paintings use a system of color derived from the colors of the medication I interact with on a daily basis, ongoing over many years. I deploy this into abstract formulations of the visceral vulnerability and hiddenness arising from societal constructions of time, productivity, and medical pathologizing of disability and illness that impact

opportunity for meaningful inclusion and value. Painting the non apparent is a political act of mark-making, in formulations of pain and experiences of illness on the terms of Crip time, space, aesthetics, and productivity. The work offers an alternative space, in opposition to the arbitrary scales and valuations created by Capitalist notions of value based on capacity to be “productive,” as well as the medical-industrial complex that tries to measure and determine what pain looks like, and, subsequently, what type of care is prescribed and available. My art practice utilizes medical aesthetics in color and form, in relation to objects of care, all as markers or renderings of living with chronic illness as valuable and normal. This is a push at nondisabled norms, and can be a platform for engagement with the presence of topics not normally seen in cultural spheres as valued knowledge.

Artworks in Exhibition:

Works are for sale; please email

mwhitman@mmjccmanhattan.org for more information

1.

(Medication 6) Body Without Organs: Intensities Such as Pain,
acrylic on canvas, 48x72 in., 2018



Image Description: Installation shot of a 4 by 6 foot painting on canvas with a deep red and umber background, layered with geometric triangular shapes in blue, green, orange, and pink that are floating, rising, falling, and crashing on the canvas, giving it a sense of upending or kinetic piercing.

About the work: (*Medication 6*) *Body Without Organs: Intensities Such as Pain*, is a rendering of feelings and sensations as an alternative, a system of measures or mappings of chronic pain as visceral abstraction in opposition to how pain is gauged arbitrarily on a pain scale in medicalized settings, often discounting sick/disabled people's own knowledge of their bodies, which can lead to medical neglect and further harm. This work contests the notion that pain can only be captured or expressed in the languages of scales, and ratings utilized in medical settings. Unending, upending, and overflowing can be sensed in seeing the falling and crashing of the shapes and colors on the canvas.

2.

Disease, Health, Remission (or so they say)

acrylic on canvas, three 60x60 in. paintings, 2014/2020



Image Description: Three canvases, a triptych of related color stories. The left one uses a green background mixed

with black, layered with magenta streaks all over the surface, and two vertical strips of color bracing the painting. The left vertical strip is purple, the right vertical strip is cobalt blue. The middle painting is a tinted green mixed with white, and red intertwined in brush strokes all over the surface. The painting on the right is the same green mixed with grey and has delineations of darker brushstrokes against the lighter wash of the background.

About the work: These paintings render a glimpse into the blurry categories of the different states of “being” in disease, health, and remission, or so the doctors say. The works highlight the ways the clinical terms make distinctions of disease and the body, yet these delineations often feel indistinguishable with the constant underlying fluctuation of experiences between the body with illness and day-to-day living in an ableist society. The notion of being healthy or sick as defined categories does not take into account that bodies are fallible and uncontrollable, and that societal constructs perpetuate and create further sickness and disablement.

The paintings take up space and beckon a closer look at our categorisations, and to the ways we mark each other accordingly. With systemic oppression such as inaccessible public transit, overly expensive access to care, and high rates of poverty further enacted through the government’s

qualifications for disability assistance for those unable to work. There are ways that we as a society and community can refocus on what we can control, which are our infrastructure, values, attitudes, and policies, without blaming disability and individual bodies as problems. We need to create accessible and inclusive spaces for sick and disabled people to participate and thrive no matter what state of being they are clinically categorized in.

3.

You shall observe it as a festival throughout the ages

וְחִגַּתְּם אֹתוֹ חֹג לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם

2019, acrylic on wooden planks from family sukkah



Image Description: Three painted wooden planks leaning and centered on a wall. The left-most plank is light yellow with magenta triangles painted throughout the surface, seemingly floating, falling, or crashing. The center plank is orange with deep red triangles on the surface, seemingly floating, falling, and crashing. The right-most plank is deep red with a white band near the top.

About the work:

Here we propose sickness as structure.

Here we ask what illness as festival might be.

Here we find disability/sickness/illness as cyclical and ritual.

The paintings are a continuation of the Medication series of paintings, in which the color palette is derived from colors of medication taken over time. The palette is an entry point and a permission into exploring ritualistic and aesthetic relationships of care, pain, family, a community—and other notions of living in a medicalized body, a sick body, its surroundings, inner workings, and thoughts.

The planks are taken from the family sukkah. A sukkah (plural *sukkot*) is a temporary outdoor structure, haven, or abode that Jews construct, eat meals in, and sometimes live in each year for the celebration of the holiday of Sukkot,

one of the three High Holidays mentioned in the Torah. These are meant to be reminders of the temporary structures that Israelites lived in during the wandering in the desert post-Exodus from bondage in Egypt. This becomes a conceptual reference in terms of the relationship to building up safe havens through ritual. The physical reference to leaning and support here takes this reference and material as an imperative to create structures of safety, haven, and abode that are accessible and can support and sustain those of us most vulnerable.

4.

SUN / MOON

שמש / לבנה

2020, acrylic on canvas, seven canvases each 18x24 in.



Image description: Seven colorful paintings with many vibrating, moving, and crashing triangles and prisms on the surfaces. They are photographed from the right side, showing the right most paintings as larger and the left most are smaller and lead the eye towards a vanishing point to the left side of the image.

About the work:

*WHEN THE SUN RISES
AND YOU FEEL STUCK*

*WHEN THE SUN SETS
AND YOU FEEL RELEASE*

*WHEN THE MOON SHINES
AND YOU FEEL THROBBING*

*WHEN THE MOON FADES
AND YOU TOO FADE*

Ruminating on the natural cycles of marking time through the sun and the moon, these paintings offer repose to the constant inertia of time felt living in a city that continuously works, seven days and seven nights, forever. This contemplates our need to mark time through action, as

mirrored with the personal ritual of marking time through awareness of the aesthetic framework the colors of medication provide every day, morning and night, week to week, and ongoing. Humans seek to mark time to provide structure to our world. These works continue in noting a connection between the natural, personal, and social rituals of marking time meaning in an overwhelming world.

Yo-Yo Lin is a Taiwanese-American interdisciplinary media artist who explores the possibilities of human connection and embodiment in the context of emerging technologies. She uses intelligent projection/lighting, digital and hand-drawn animation, interactive objects, and lush sound design to create meditative “memoryscapes.” Her work often examines human perception as a vehicle for self-knowledge and community growth.

Lin is currently researching and developing methodologies in reclaiming and processing chronic health trauma. This work in progress, entitled “Modes of Embodiment,” is composed of a digital and physical toolkit that seeks to be an expressive resource and living archive of chronically ill and disabled bodyminds.

She has shown new media works at international art galleries (Human Resources, Lincoln Center, La Corte Contemporanea), music festivals (Coachella, Panorama), film festivals (New York Film Festival, SXSW), and public art venues. She has spoken at NYU Steinhardt, Rutgers University, and UCLA, and at art institutions such as EyeBeam, A Blade of Grass, and Movement Research. Born and raised in Los Angeles, she now lives and works in New York City.

Artist Statement: I am a Taiwanese-American interdisciplinary media artist. I often use intelligent projection, digital and hand-drawn animation, and lush sound design to create meditative “memoryscapes.” My work examines human perception as a vehicle for self-knowledge and community growth. Lately I have been considering what modes of embodiment are available for the chronically ill and disabled bodymind.

Considering the crip body as a poetic, relational archive, I began tracking different “dimensions” of my illness, as a means of creating a “soft data” (as opposed to “hard data”) archive—highlighting overlooked, daily life realities of living with illness. Refusing the medicalization of the crip body, I work toward and dream of an equitable toolkit that serves as a collective site for holding space for illness. Thus far, this dream has manifested as an open-sourced journaling tool (Resilience Journal), an access-centered movement workshop series (held at Movement Research), and a live dance performance driven by the sounds of my bones and joints (“the walls of my room are curved”).

This revealing and revaluing of realities is rooted in the nuances and capabilities of the ill and disabled bodymind as a space for unprecedented aesthetics, emotion, and generosity. Notions of how the crip bodymind can be a generative source for creative expression—in visuals,

sound, tactility, shape, space, movement—coupled with my explorations in time-based media art and technologies, has created works that span from soft data visualization to soundscapes made from bone sounds to impairment-generated dance scores to extended reality installations. These explorations echo the complicated relationship between the body and technology, often precarious, discomfoting, and transformative all at once. But fundamentally, these works reveal a yearning for a deeper understanding and vision of the self, reflected back in its wholeness.

Artworks:

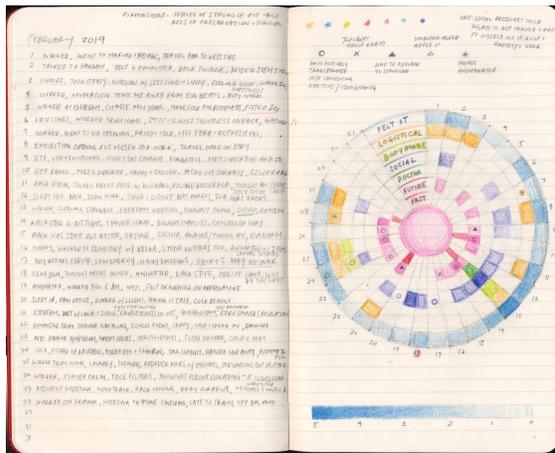
1. *Diptych of Touch Object and Personal Journal*

Title: *February 2019- Touch Object*

Materials: 3D modeling, CNC Router, wood

Size: 11.5"w x 11"h x 1"d

Image Description: A wooden sculpture version of the February circle visualization. The intensity of each experience tracked is in the extrusion of the sections on the wood- the higher the extrusion, the more intense the experience was for the artist. Initially designed as a touch object for Blind people and folks with low vision to engage with, this sculpture invites onlookers to interact with it through touch.



Title: *Personal Resilience Journal*

Materials: Paper, Colored Pencil

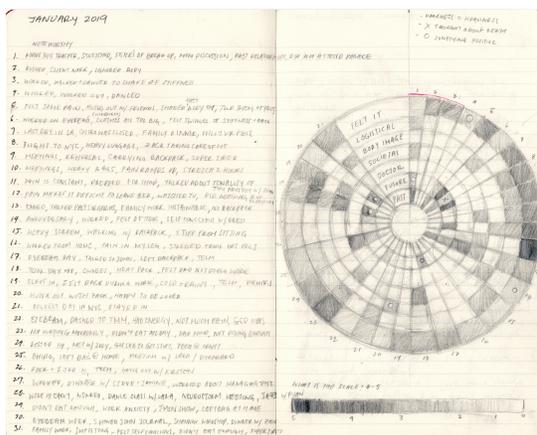
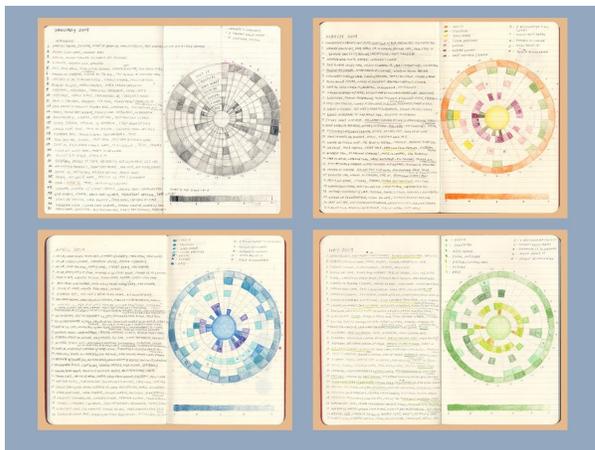
Size with frame: 11.5"w x 11"h x 1"d

Image Description: Yo-Yo's personal Resilience Journal open to the month of February. On the left side are a page full of notes numbered 1-28, the days of the month. On the right side is a circular visualization filled in with colored pencil, shades of blue, yellow, pink, green, red shaded in at various darkness levels,

representing the intensity of the experience. The circle is divided up into 7 sections, or dimensions: 1. Felt it, 2. Logistical, 3. Body Image, 4. Social Pressures, 5. Doctor, 6. Future Visions, 7. Past Memories.

2. Journal Pages January - May

Installation view is of 4 drawings, in light brown wooden frames hung in a two by two formation.

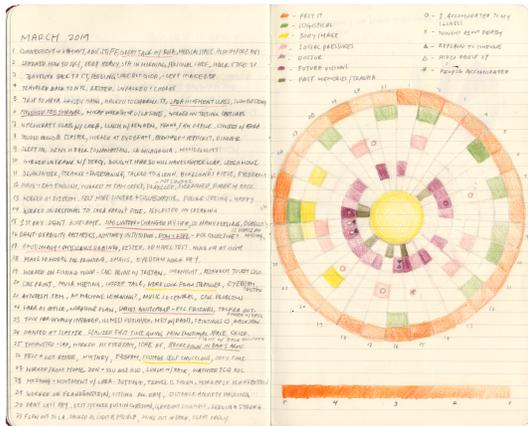


Title: *January 2019*

Materials: Paper, Pencil

Size with frame: 25"w x 19"h x 1"d

Image Description: A spread from Yo-Yo's Resilience Journal from the month of January. On the left side are a page full of notes numbered 1-31, the days of the month. On the right side is a circle visualization filled in with pencil with different sections filled in at various darkness levels.

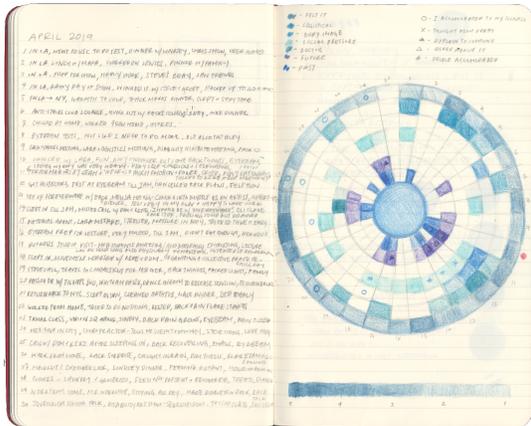


Title: *March 2019*

Materials: Paper, Colored Pencil

Size with frame: 25" w x 19" h x 1" d

Image Description: A spread from Yo-Yo's Resilience Journal from the month of March. On the left side are a page full of notes numbered 1-31, the days of the month. On the right side is a circle visualization filled in with shades of orange, pinks, yellows, and greens with different sections filled in at various darkness levels.

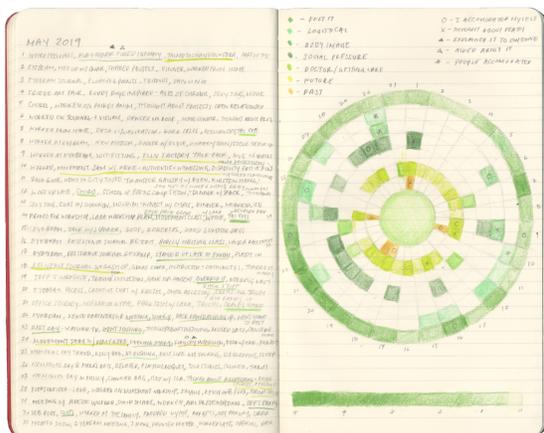


Title: *April 2019*

Materials: Paper, Colored Pencil

Size with frame: 25" w x 19" h x 1" d

Image Description: A spread from Yo-Yo's Resilience Journal from the month of April. On the left side are a page full of notes numbered 1-30, the days of the month. On the right side is a circle visualization filled in with 7 shades of blues with different sections filled in at various darkness levels.



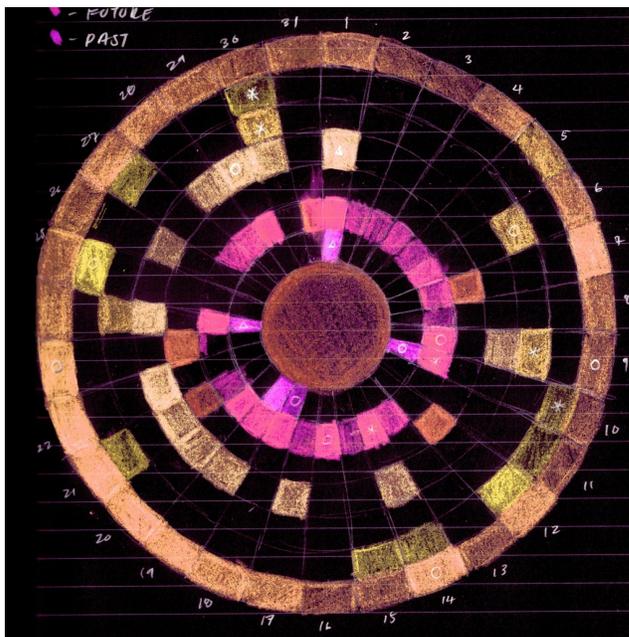
Title: *May 2019*

Materials: Paper, Colored Pencil

Size with frame: 25" w x 19" h x 1" d

Image Description: A spread from Yo-Yo's Resilience Journal from the month of May. On the left side are a page full of notes numbered 1-31, the days of the month. On the right side is a circle visualization filled in with 7 shades of greens with different sections filled in at various darkness levels.

3. *Durational drawing performance of Resilience Journal*



Title: TBD

Materials: Colored Pencil, Camera, Artist, Witnesses

Installation: Work sketched out on February 24th using projector on-site.

Every week for the month of March the artist will come in with a witness, a camera, and fill in the circle sections. The artist will record the actions of the ephemeral performative ritual.

Romily Alice Walden is a transdisciplinary artist whose work centers a queer, disabled perspective on the fragility of the body. Walden's practice spans sculpture, installation, video, and printed matter, all of which is undertaken with a socially engaged and research-led working methodology. Recent work has shown at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art: Newcastle, Hebel Am Uffer: Berlin, SOHO20: New York and Tate Modern: London. Walden is currently a fellow of the UdK Graduate School, Berlin, and in 2019 was a Shandaken Storm King resident.

Romily Alice Walden's work is concerned with physicality and its interplay with other social categorizations and power differentials. At the core of their practice is an interrogation of contemporary embodiment and its relation to the Post-Internet age. Walden's work questions contemporary Western society's relationship with care, tenderness, and fragility in relation to our bodies, our communities, and our ecosystem.

These themes are explored with a focus on the IRL/URL paradigm; Walden is interested in our ability to navigate the progressively interwoven online and offline facets of our lived experience, examining the effect of this progression on the way that we understand physicality, interdependency, and vulnerability. As a queer, disabled artist, Walden is interested in the production of the "other";

exploring the power of “othered” bodies to instigate changes in perception and normative cultural discourse. The vulnerability of the body has served as a focus for Walden's practice since 2017; recent work seeks to disturb overly simplistic understandings of the disabled body, looking to bring an ethic of care, a connection between the land and the body, and a crippled concept of performance into conversation with their practice. Walden's research interests include cyborg theory, disability theory, crip theory, queer theory, post-humanism, autoethnography, and utopian/dystopian futures. Their practice spans installation, sculpture, performance, text, video, and coded Arduino control systems, all of which is undertaken with a socially engaged and research-led working methodology.

Artworks:

My Body Is The House That I Live In: F.G, L.G and R.A.W.
Three sets of seven white neon tubes, white earbud headphones, arduino modules and small screens, 2019.



Image Description: One of the arrays of seven fluorescent tubes, with power strips and earbud headphones beneath. The bottom tube is bright, the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 6th are dim, the 1st and 5th tubes are off

About the Work: The installations *My Body Is The House That I Live In*: F.G, L.G and R.A.W., consist of 7 white neon tubes, placed horizontally, one below the other on the gallery wall. Each tube corresponds to a facet of “wellness”: physical, emotional, mental/intellectual, occupational, sexual, social, and spiritual. Every hour, a sick/disabled participant assigns each wellness category a number from 0-10, 0 being no wellness in that category and 10 being full wellness; that number will determine each tube’s brightness for the next hour. At 0 the tube will be off; for each number up to 10, the tube will glow fractionally brighter, with a score of 10 corresponding to full brightness. On the gallery floor, six

Arduino/C++ modules are coded to repeat the data collected from each participant for the duration of the exhibition. Computer-generated voices endlessly loop, TFT screens refresh and reload every minute; offering the same data translated into written form.

This work has developed out of a realization that Western society views pain and sickness as experiences that should be confined to private spaces, as Susan Wendell (2006, p.247)* writes:

The public world is the world of strength, the positive (valued) body, performance and production, the able-bodied and youth. Weakness, illness, rest and recovery, pain, death, and the negative (devalued) body are private, generally hidden, and often neglected. Coming into the public world with illness, pain, or a devalued body, we encounter resistance to splitting the two worlds; the split is vividly revealed.

One sick or disabled woman/gender-nonconforming participant controls each installation for the duration of the exhibition. In this way each work becomes a durational performance of living with sickness, one that views disability as a political issue, moving illness out of isolation and into the public realm.

The work simultaneously points to the inadequacy of our common cultural language surrounding sickness, pain, and disability. Making use of the 0-10 pain scale employed by the medical industrial complex, the installations illustrate the failings of representing bodies, pain, and sickness in numerical form. Here we see individual experiences reduced to statistics; leaky, messy, and multilayered conditions are reduced to numbers on a scale. While the work attempts to bring sickness, chronic illness, pain, and disability into the public space, it also reflects upon the pitfalls of trying to make sickness palatable and understandable for a nondisabled audience.

*Wendell, S. (2006). *Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability*. In: L. Davis, ed., *The Disability Studies Reader*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge, pp.243-256.