



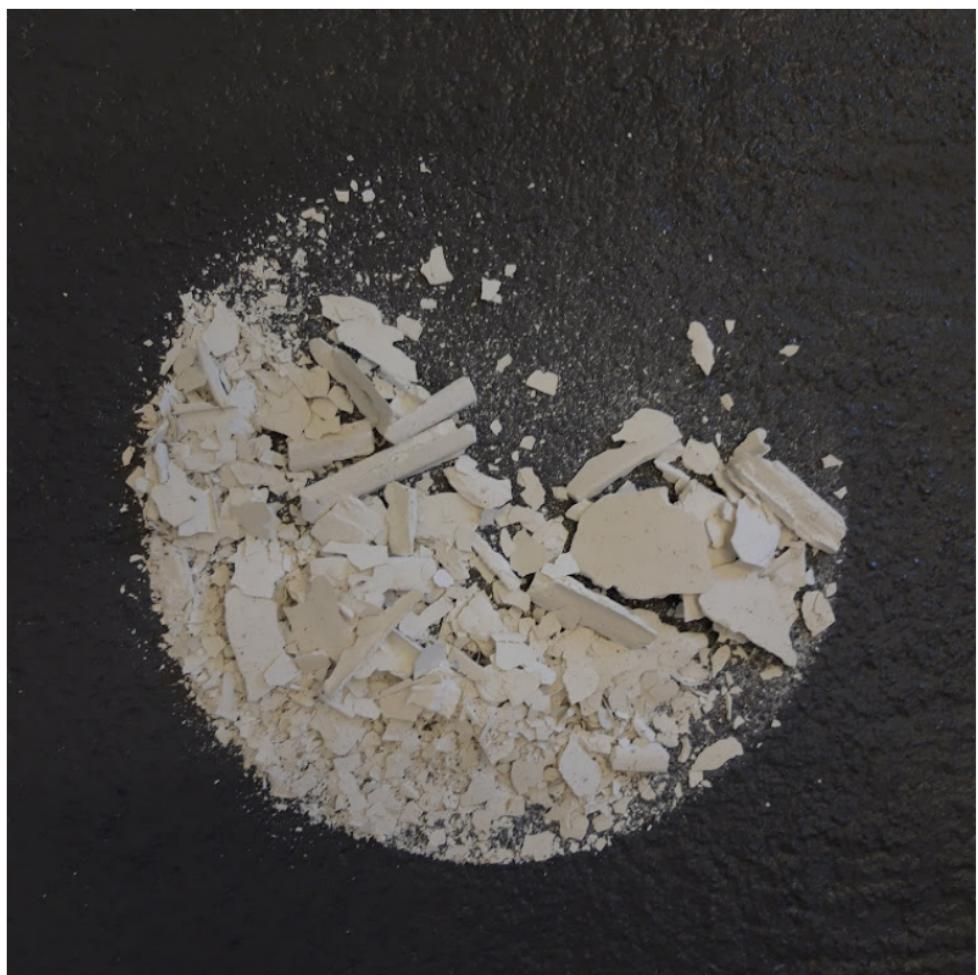
Untitled: Work in Process (Working Title)

Mark Fearbunce

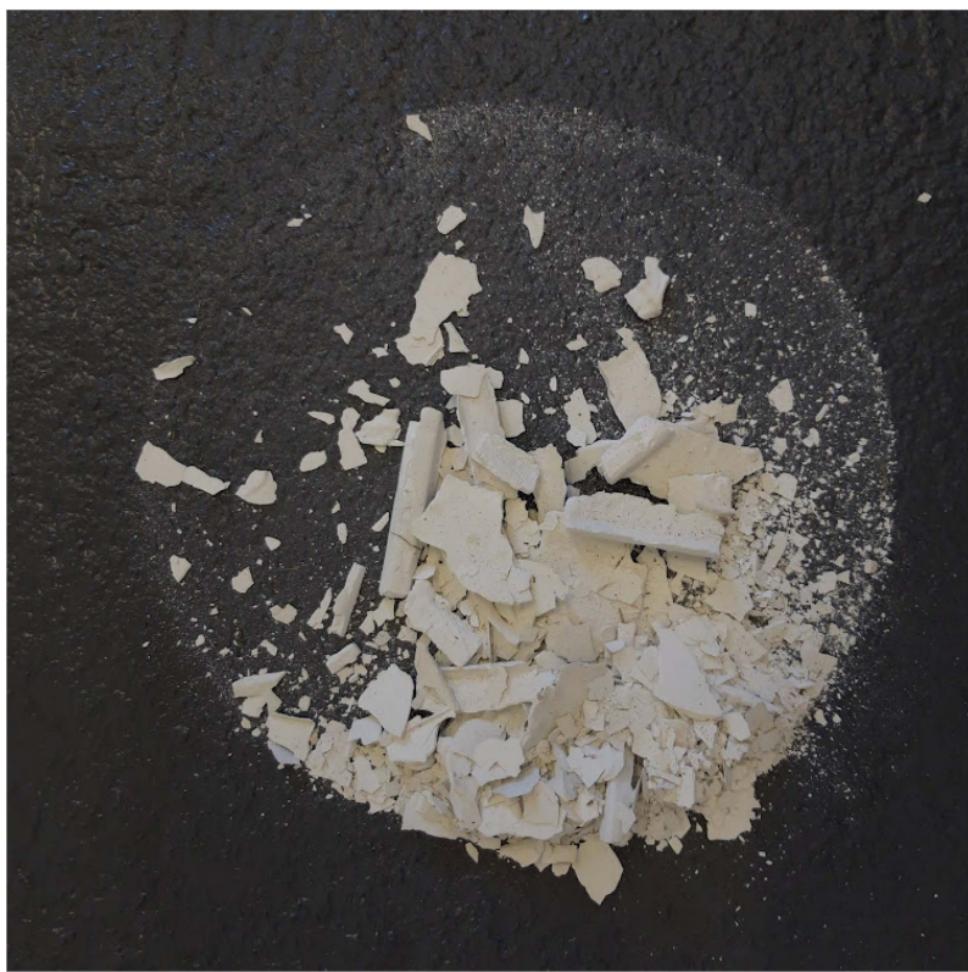
# Untitled: Work in Process (Working Title)

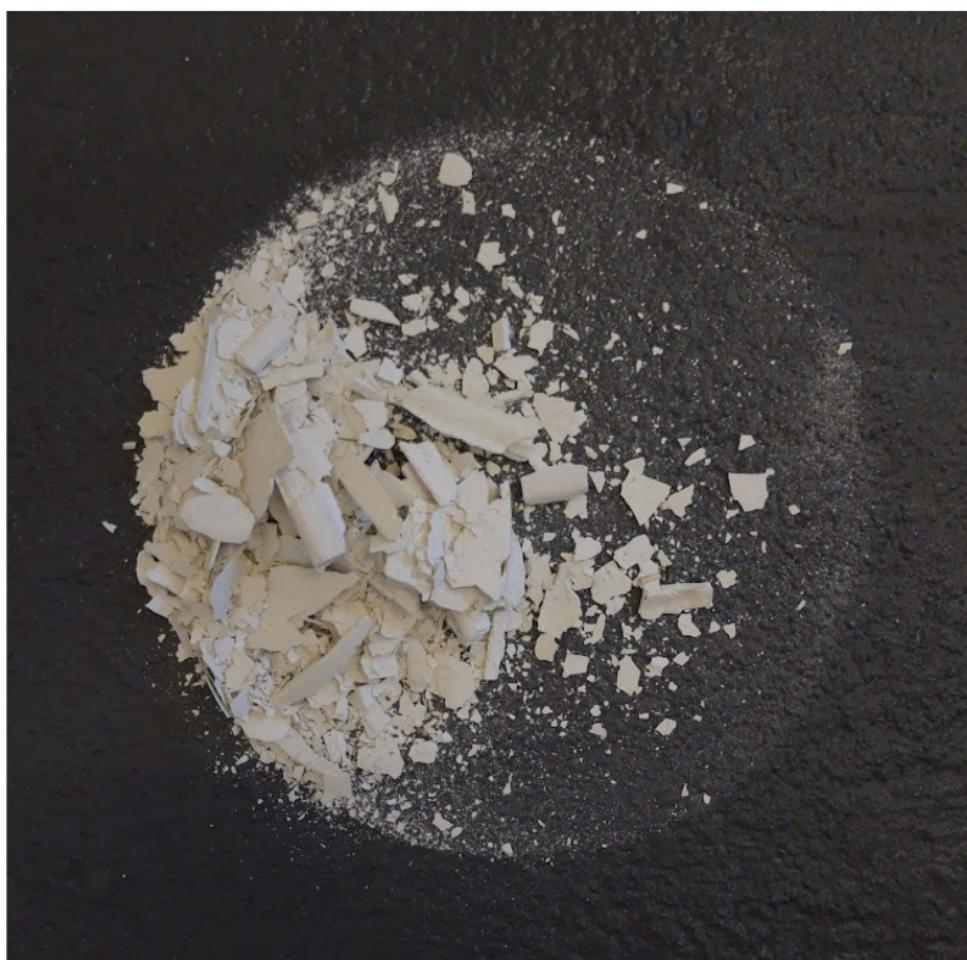


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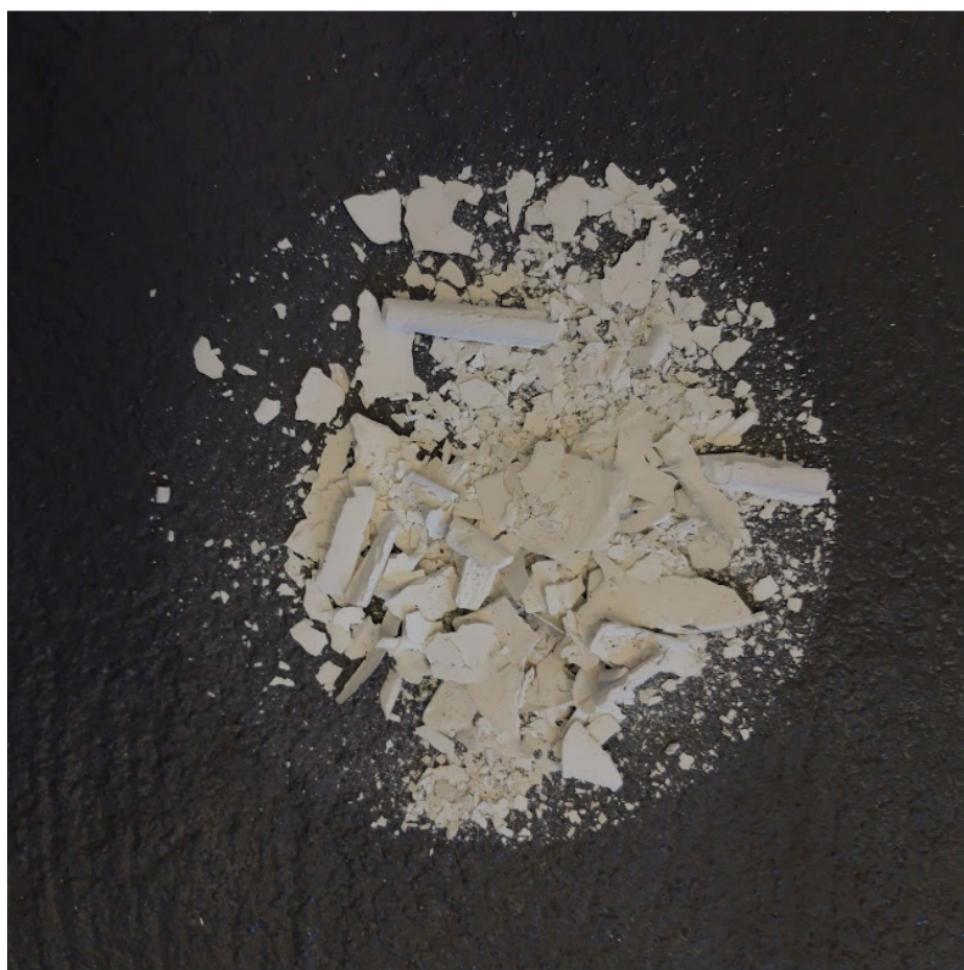


*Untitled: (Moon Phases)*

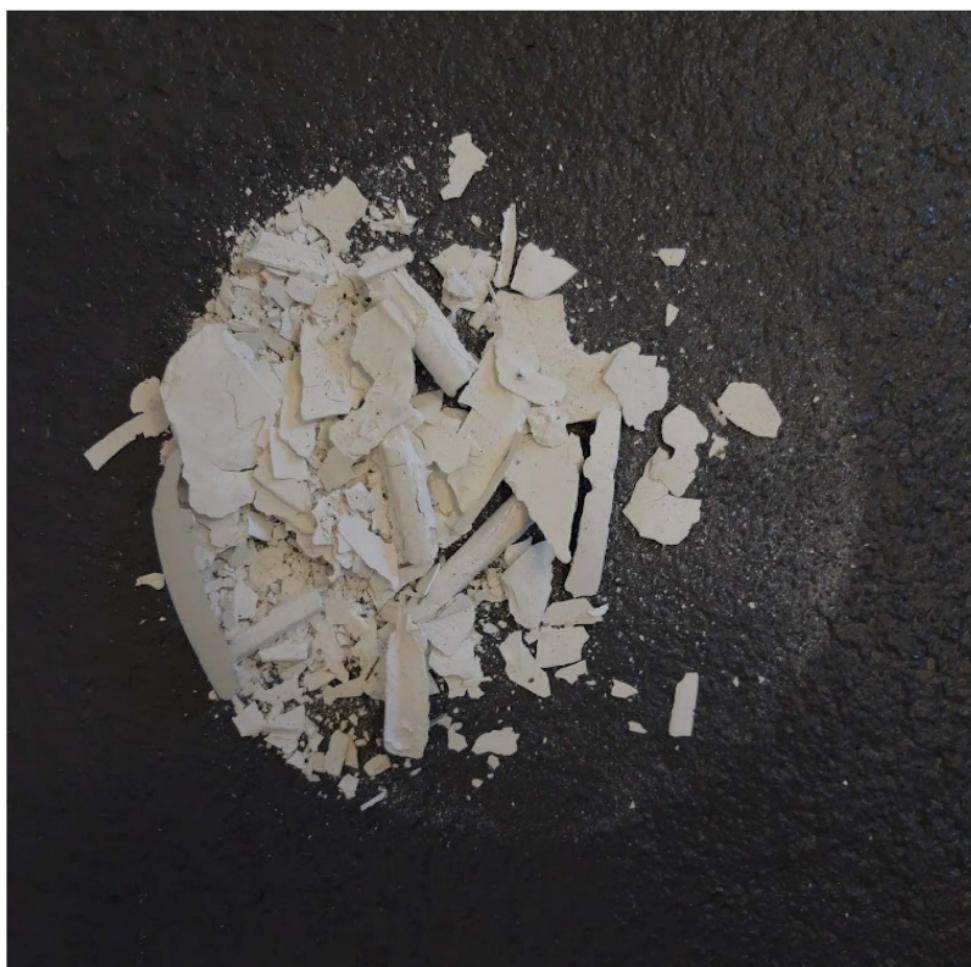


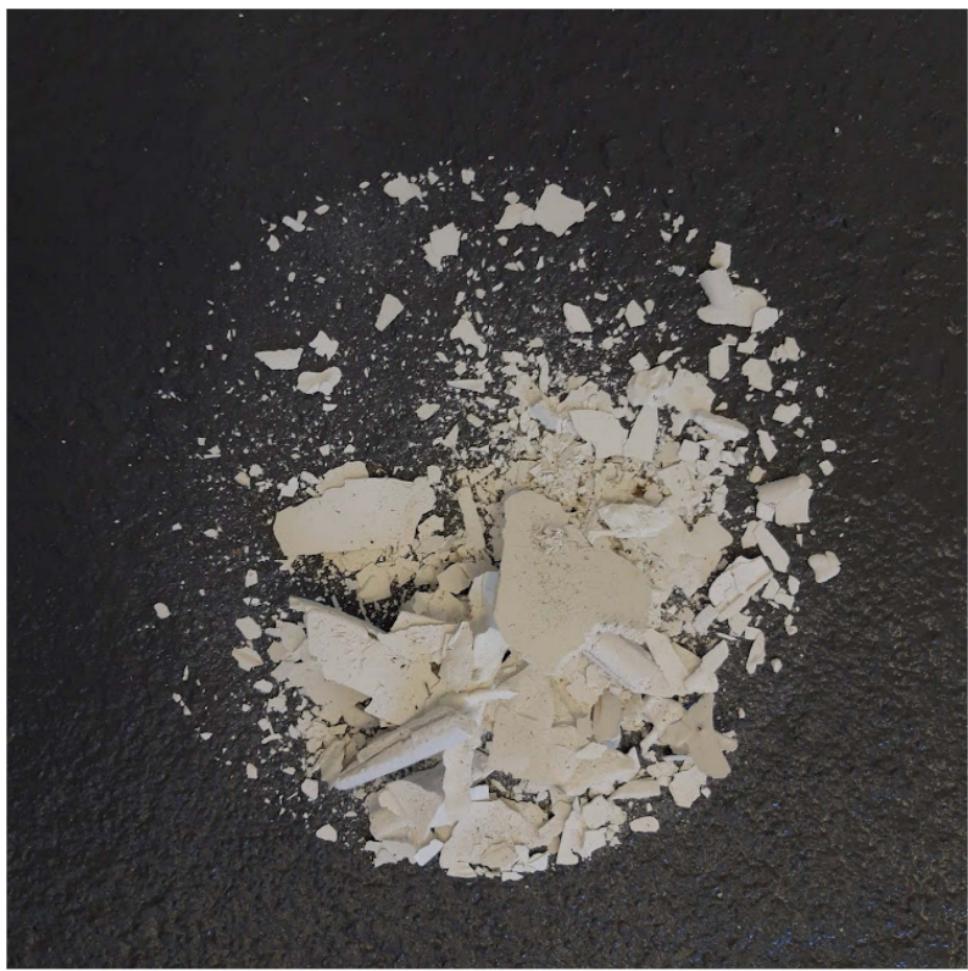






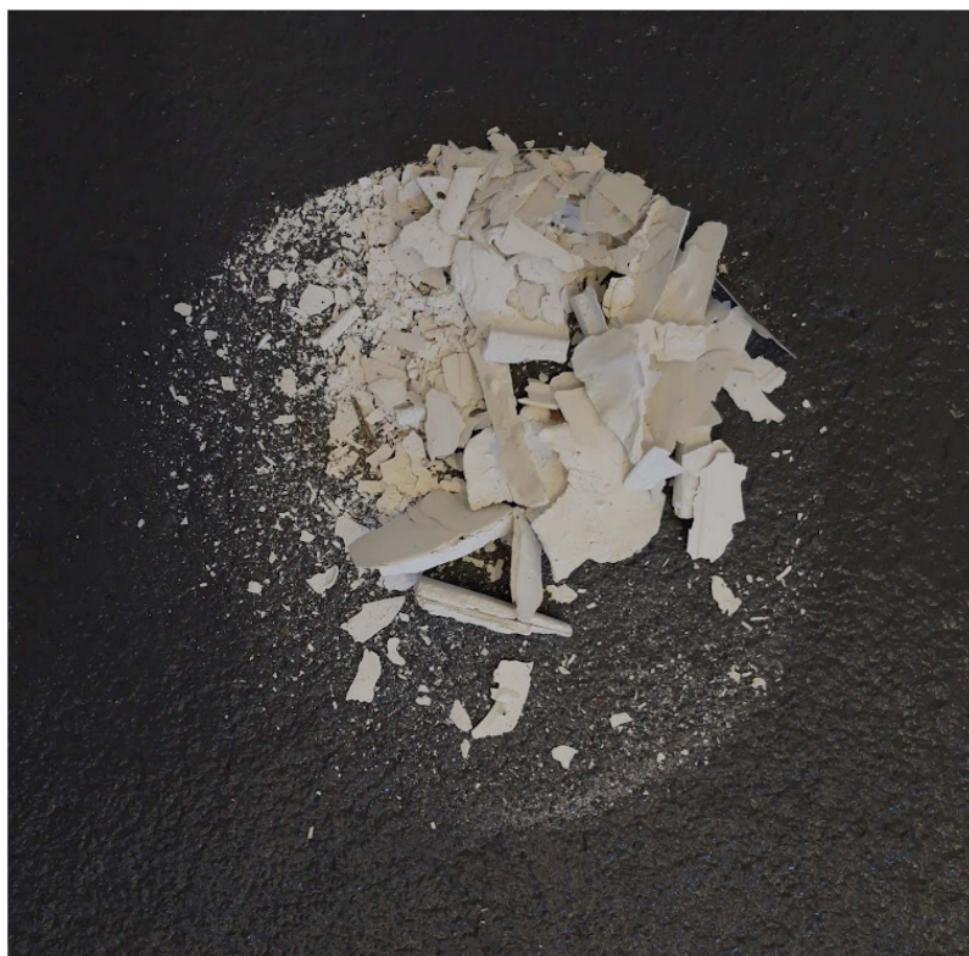


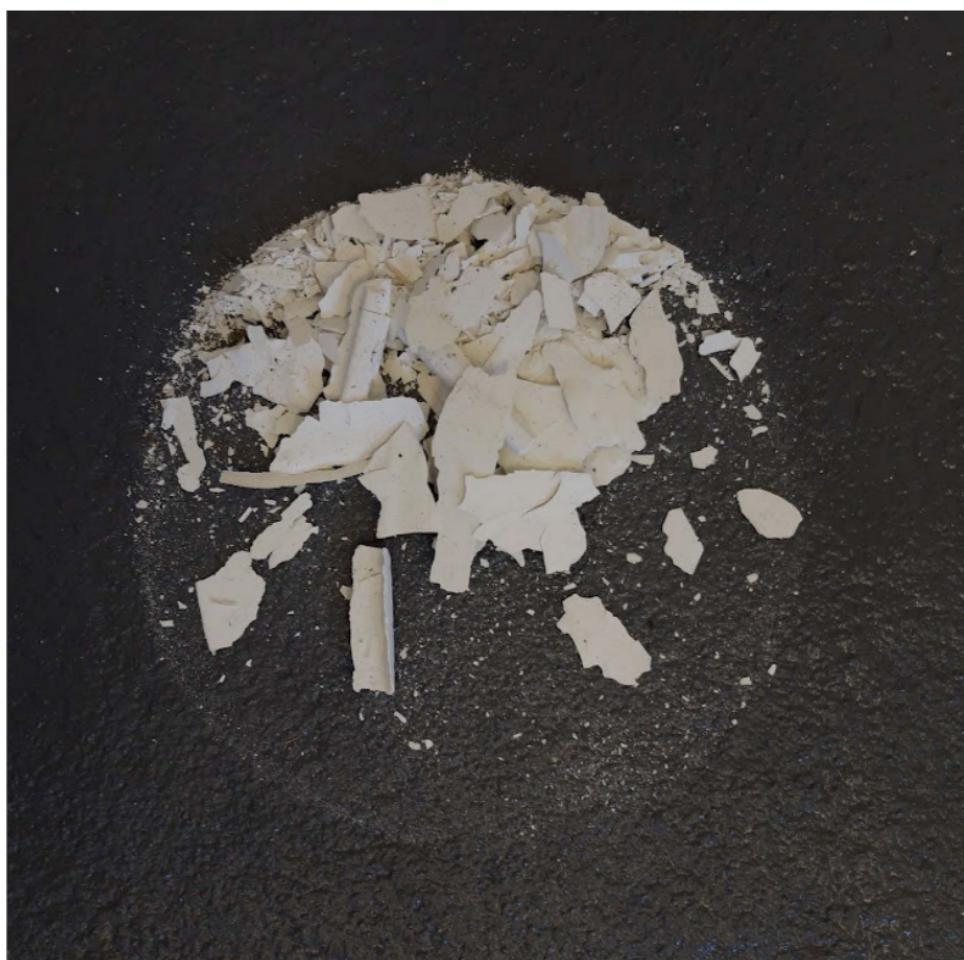


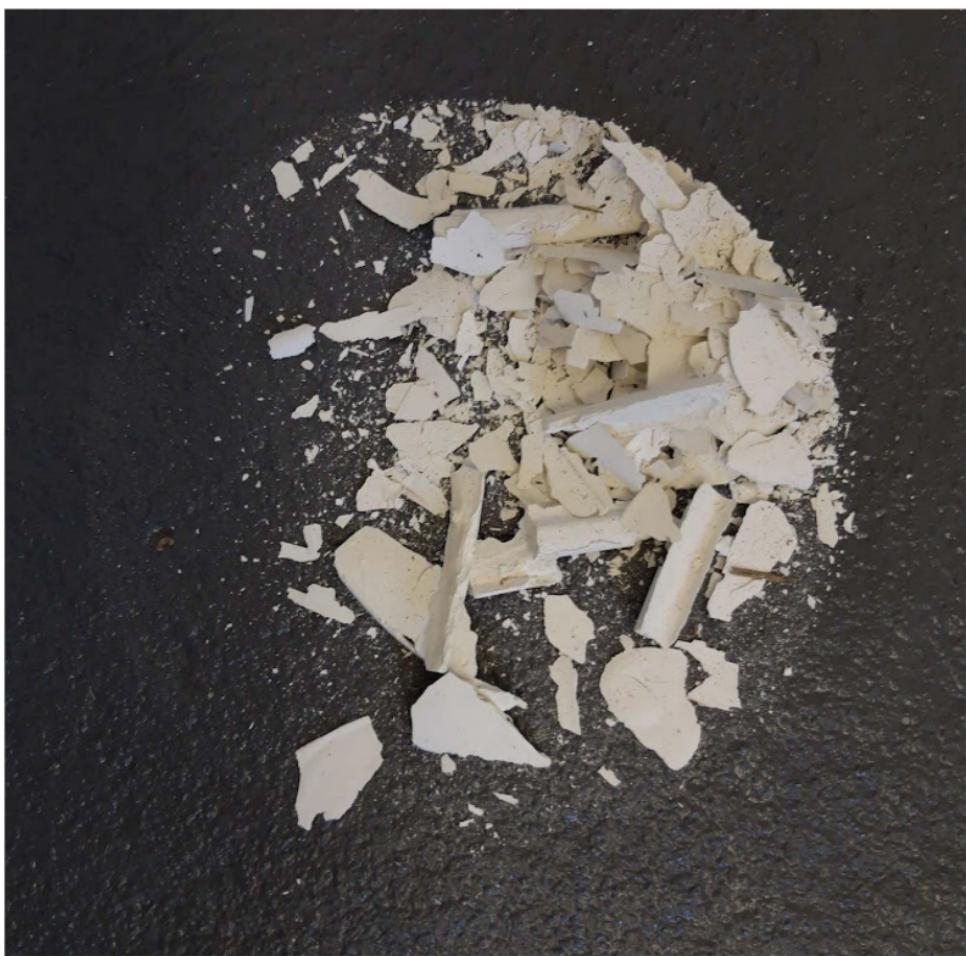














The moon is for everyone, but no-one owns it. It holds stories for everyone, but no-one owns its narrative. The moon is a leveller. It represents freedom of movement. It is democratic and uniting. It is hopeful.



# The Artist and the Artwork: An Evidently Manifest Relationship

Here are some thoughts about how art is made and by whom. There are also some thoughts about status and visibility. The purpose of these thoughts is to begin to unpick the relationship between art the processes that enable art to be. Each thought could be elaborated, refined or quashed. It is an emergence. It is a part of a process.



Art being a product made by an artist seems straightforward enough. It has been so, within the Western culture, for centuries. This connection is underpinned by the signature, in its various forms, from Ghiberti's likeness appearing on the baptistery doors in Florence, to Caravaggio's signature appearing in the blood of his depiction of John the Baptist, and everything before and since. Sometimes subtle, sometimes ostentatious, these attributions have built careers, sustained reputations and secured financial valuations. It is not only these practical and commercial interests that are served by the signature. The signature feeds into the narrative of the artist genius, the artist prodigy, the myth of the artist and so on. Thus the artist as a cultural phenomenon is born, more than mere maker of aesthetic things. The mystique that surrounds the artist has long been the subject of art too. Durer or Rembrandt's self portraits go beyond the 'signature' self-portrait of Ghiberti, yet are not the expression of identity or self-narrative to the extent of Caravaggio or, say, Frida Kahlo. Durer and Rembrandt's self portraits carry, amongst other things of course, the expression of an artist genius, a cultured being, a tortured or soulful individual. More myth-making.

But like the bronze general on horseback, it is the deeds, or processes, of the worthy-subject that also carry weight. We see it culturally in the photographs of Francis Bacon's studio and the popularity of artist stories such as the movie made of Vermeer's *Girl with the Pearl Earring* or Martin Gayford's book *The Yellow House* about Van Gogh's time in Arles. More mystique, more tortured genius. As long as the processes meet the expectations of the myth of the artist, the processes are fit to make art about too. The general is on horseback after all, not at home having a cuppa.

Jasper Johns' *Painted Bronze* (1960), the one with the brushes in a tin, not the beer cans, Robert Gober's tin of paint, *Untitled* (2005-6), and Fischli and Weiss' Polyurethane installations all show parts of the artist studio. Even Gavin Turk's coffee cup, *Nomadic Existence* (2003) indirectly references the working practices of the artist. Unlike the documentary photographs of Bacon's studio, this is the art itself. Johns' humble coffee tin re-purposed to store brushes, or the ordinariness of Gober's tin of paint not only allude to the starving artist in the garret, making do, but the illusion of painted bronze or painted glass evokes the artist genius through the tale of Zeuxis and Parrhasius: artists prized for their ability to fool through their command of illusion. Fischli and Weiss' studio is a fake too, with an illusion designed to fool, then impress. Some myths, like the starving artist, seem like a thing of the past when considering the careers of Jeff Koons or Damien Hirst, and the market as whole. Meanwhile, other myths, such as the artist-alchemist are enduring. What the artist does is transform. And while the relationship between artist and artwork remains largely intact, there is no reason to see the magic disappear yet.

It is worth noting here that there are other factors at play. The materiality of the work for a start. Turk and Johns use bronze. There's that general on horseback again. But even where bronze is not used, such as with Fischli and Weiss, there is a gallery context too. Carol Duncan and Brian O'Doherty have both written about the ability of galleries to have a transformative effect on their contents. The objects within are to be scrutinised closer than everyday objects, even if they appear to be everyday objects. And because the objects mentioned above are of the artist studio, they suggest the mechanics of that transformation too: O'Doherty suggests that objects in an artist's studio are 'subject to alteration and revision. All are thus potentially unfinished. They - and the studio itself - exist under the sign of process'\*'. With the material, subject, illusion, authorship and presentation-contexts of these objects, we are fed with a whopping multi-layered cake of artistic alchemy.

\*O'Doherty, Brian. 2007. *Studio and Cube: On the relationship between where art is made and where art is displayed* (New York: Columbia University) p.18

Within the established relationship between art and artist, Bruce Nauman's actions are based on the premise that art is what an artist does. Nauman's *Setting a Good Corner (Allegory and Metaphor)* (1999), however, takes this premise beyond a context of making or exhibiting art. There is no studio. There is no gallery. Nauman is working on his ranch, making a fence. Martin Herbert puts it thus: 'Nauman is talking here about an art of living, of dailyness: patience, preparation, establishing a foundation, taking advice, thinking in stages, doing the (literally) boring stuff, over and over.\* While the video, the evidence of this act, is itself an artwork which speaks of patience, preparation and the rest, it is the act itself which is the patience and the preparation. Herbert goes on to say that 'it's increasingly rare to have those experiences where something you thought wasn't art becomes it', surely talking about the act as the art, rather than the video shown in a gallery.

\*Herbert, Martin. 2018. 'Bruce Nauman: In the Good Corner' in Art Review. Summer 2018. Vol 70, no 5. pp. 66-71. p. 71

In order to recognise the context for this, we can take a brief detour outside of a Western cultural narrative. Let us consider the practice of making kolams in Tamil Nadu, India; traditional floor drawings in rice flour, seen by their makers as a form of housework. With the aesthetic quality of these daily floor drawings, alongside the value placed on the skill of the maker and the lack of a utilitarian function, it is not surprising that, from a Western perspective, we find ourselves in a position where it is easier to comprehend kolams as art, rather than as housework. Meanwhile, watching Nauman fix a fence may be easier to relate to as maintenance than art. This has something to do with functionality and perceived symbolism no doubt. The opposite position, one where the kolams are maintenance and Nauman's fence is art, is held by context rather than by presence alone. This context is primarily in the status of the artist. Or, more precisely, the connection between artwork and artist. The makers of kolams do not consider themselves artists as Nauman does. This is due to different cultural conceptions of art, and culture itself, around the globe. So, 'artist' is not a fixed designation, and neither is 'art'. While this implies there is room to disrupt the relationship between the two, I'm interested here in seeing how disruption can occur within that relationship.

The relationship between art and maintenance is more overtly present in the works of Mierle Laderman Ukeles. She undertook maintenance work and framed it as art. Her performative work involved a community of maintenance workers in various ways, such as the artist shaking workers' hands and thanking them. The word maintenance is key here. Helen Molesworth points to how maintenance exists between the public and private spheres. While domestic labour is wholly private, maintenance happens to the public realm, but often happens in private. This opposition serves to emphasise the lowly status of housework and maintenance. Note how the visibility of the kolam-makers' street drawings may position housework in Tamil Nadu on a comparatively higher status, if we accept visibility as a marker of status. Ukeles raises the status of maintenance to art whilst simultaneously manifesting the 'Duchampian legacy of art's investigation of its own meaning, value and institutionality'\* So, at once there is a potential conflict in utilising the relationship between art and artist to legitimise traditionally non-art activities as art, whilst challenging the very system that enables this to happen at all. To some extent, it cancels itself out.

\*Molesworth, Helen. 2008. 'House Work and Art Work' in S. Johnstone (ed.) *The Everyday: Documents of Contemporary Art*. (London: Whitechapel Gallery) pp. 170-182. p.173

Roland Barthes declared the death of the author, but there was still an implication that there needs to be an author. Fundamentally, the artist remains pivotal in the creation, or assignation of art. If that which is deemed art can simultaneously exist and have its existence questioned, because of the actions, or non-actions, of the artist, then it may be the very relationship between art and artist where art resides. That relationship is not simply the connection between person and a visible product, but in the processes, preparations, thoughts and reflections, and general good housekeeping that contribute to art becoming.

This is the point of departure for this body of work.

## EVIDENTLY MANIFEST(O)

Doing nothing is art

Thinking about doing something is art

Preparing to do something is art

Doing something is art

Evidence of doing nothing, thinking about doing something, preparing to do something or doing something is evidence of art.

The evidence might be art itself

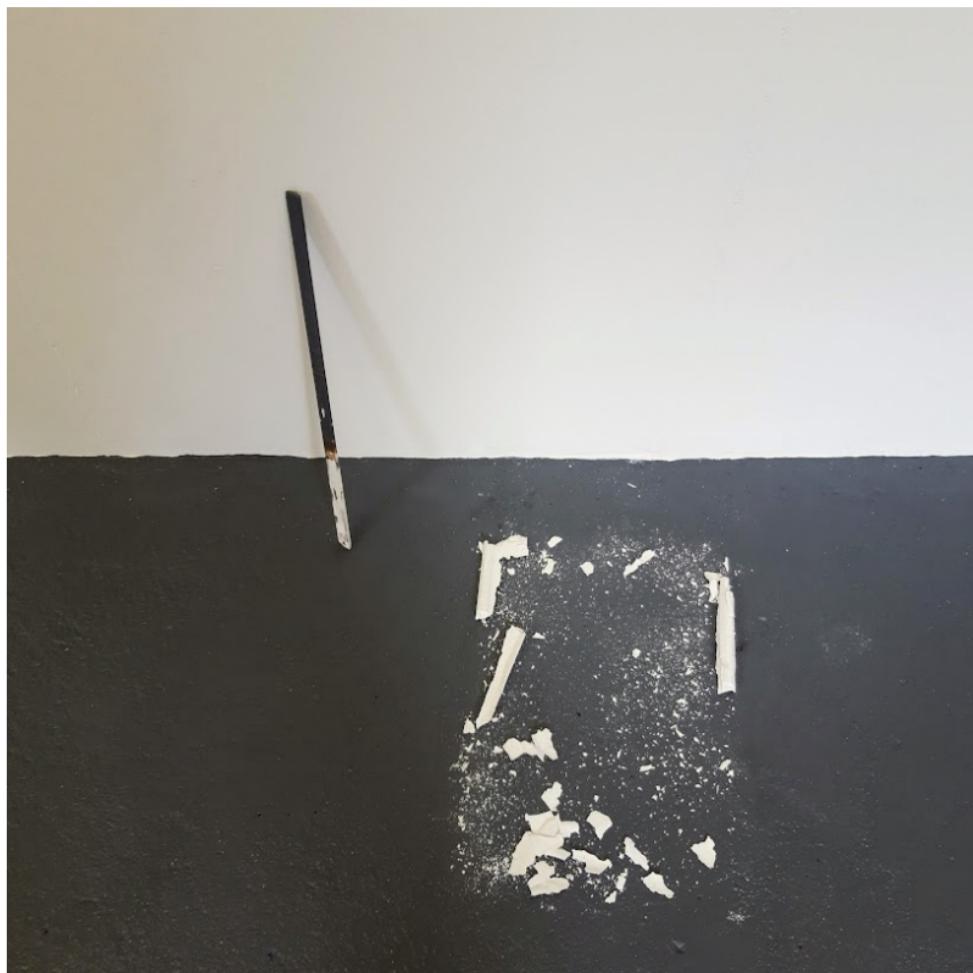
The evidence might only be evidence.

Does the art need evidence?

Must art be manifest?



*Untitled: (Floating Paintbrush)*



*Untitled: (Procrastination Potential)*





*Untitled: (Stirring Sticks)*

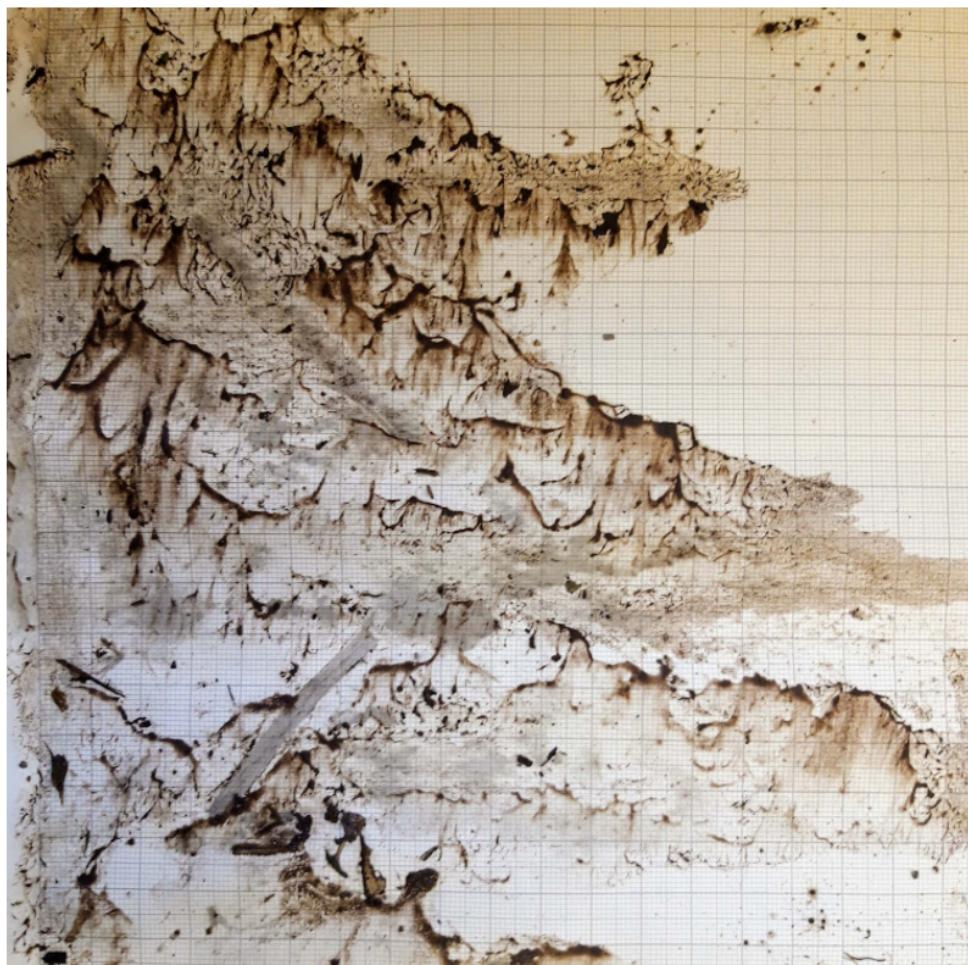




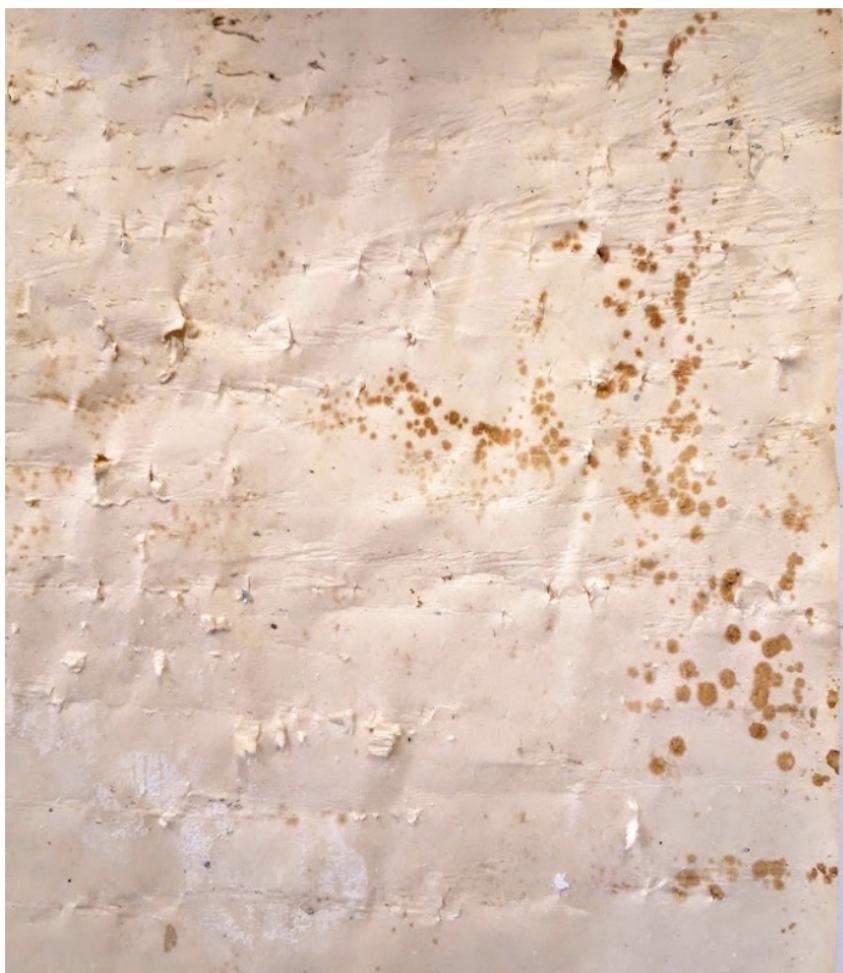
*Untitled: (Projection)*



*Untitled: (Flood Drawing)*



*Untitled: (Flood Drawing)*

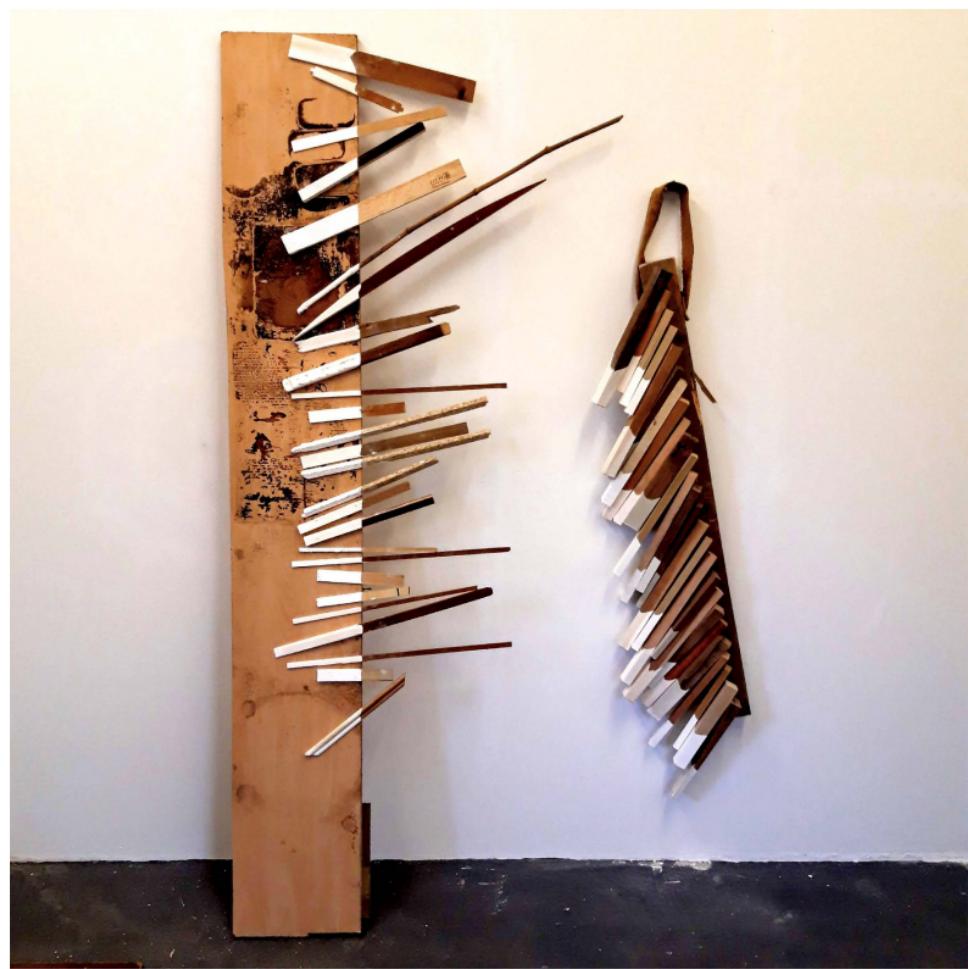




*Untitled: (Hung, Unhung, Rehung)*



*Untitled: (Artscape)*



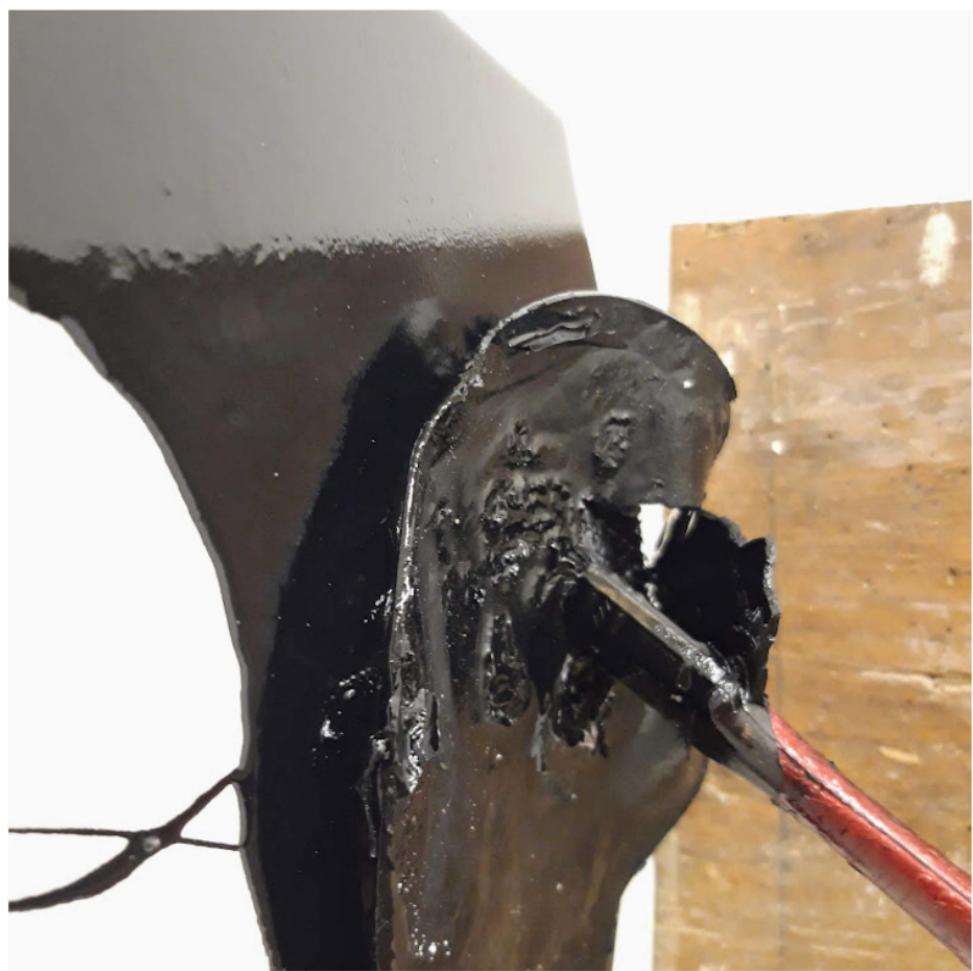
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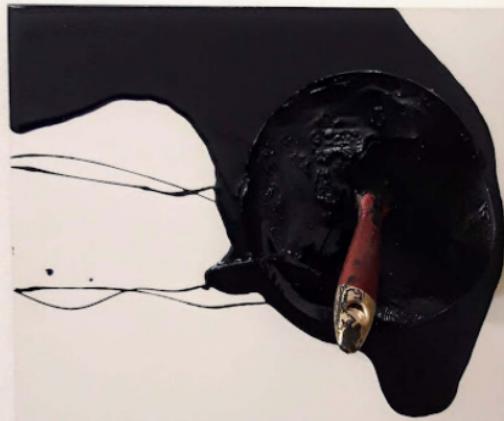




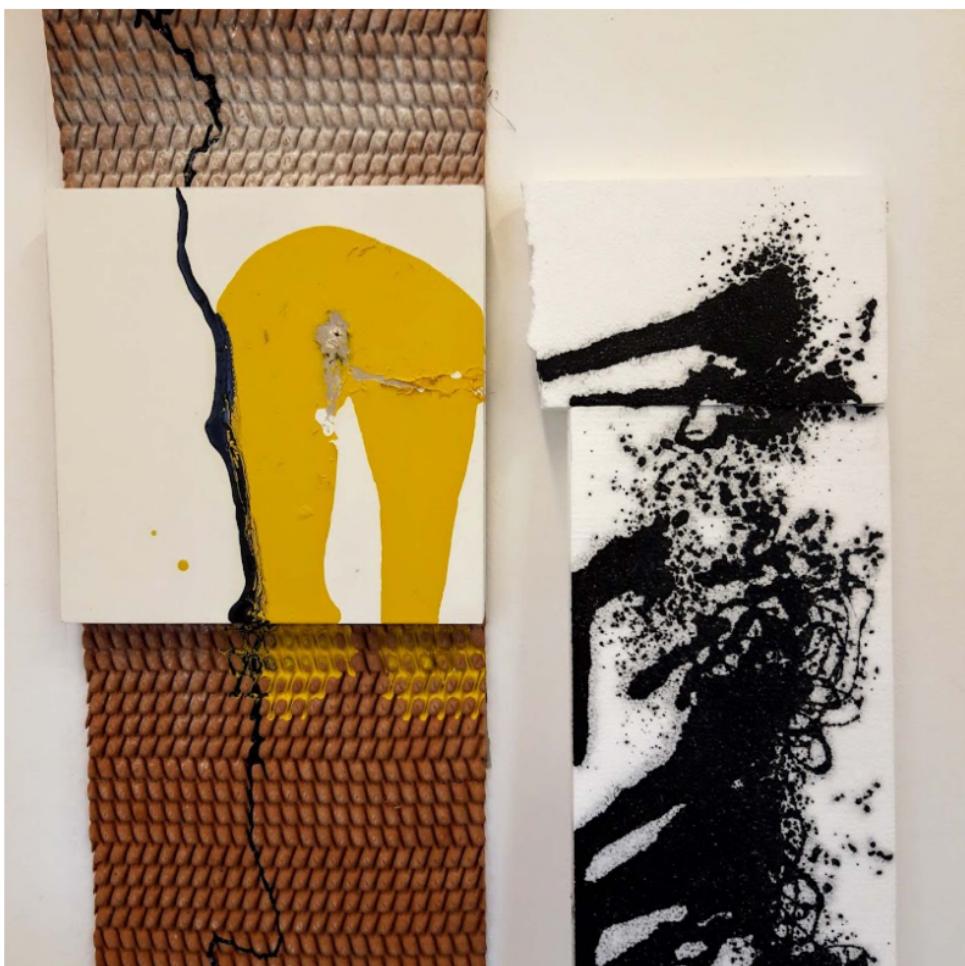
*Untitled: (Pre/Post)*

(opposite) *Untitled: (Corner Painting)*

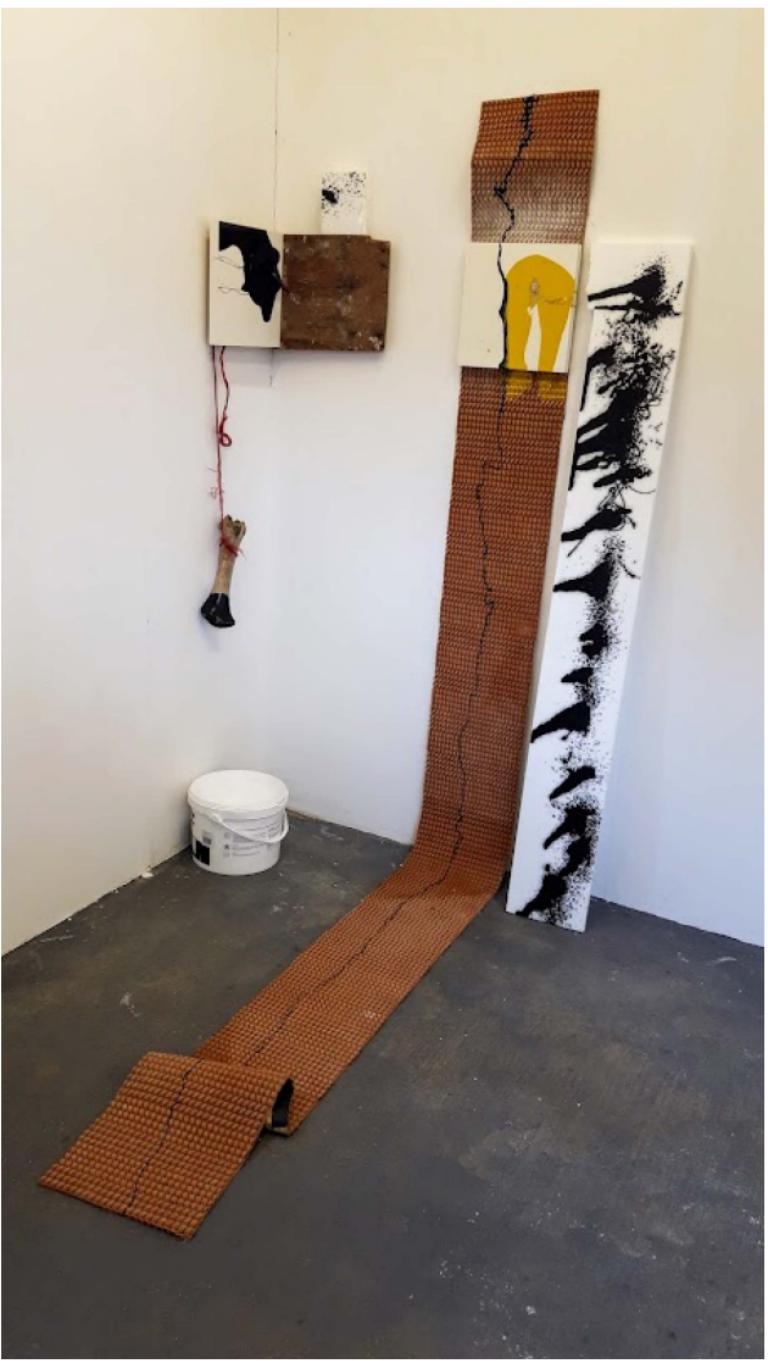




*Untitled: (/)*



*Untitled: (Pre/Pair)*







*Untitled: (Shaggy)*

2022