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This thesis is written to accompany and support my ideas behind the final thesis show, Object Lessons, and my remaining work to date. The collection of paintings, sculptures, and drawings together with the way they are displayed are strongly connected by ideas of intersections with music and with systems. Systems of language, musical notation, numeric notation all have a place in my work as catalysts for flights of imagination. To give physical form to abstract ideas is an important aspect of my work.

I have worked within a restricted color palette, one based on earth pigments, avoiding the bright cadmium colors of a contemporary palette. Yellow Ochre, Raw Siena, Mars Black, Titanium White and Naples Red are the staples in my paint-box. Most of my ideas of color derive from looking at ancient ruins in Pompeii and the Domus Aurea in Rome.

I love ancient history, and the three UNCG trips to Florence, Rome and Venice have brought my attention to the remains of pigment in ancient ruins, more specifically in Pompeii and the Domus Aurea in Rome. Ancient ruins are tied to my content by way of the remnants of the found objects I use. None of the objects are intact. They have been distorted in various ways. They are completely removed from their functional use.

I am interested in the history of painting and in the origins of things and ideas. Although it is not at all necessary to prepare rabbit skin glue in a double boiler to prepare a canvas for a contemporary work, I feel connected to the past, to past painters for whom this ritual was part and parcel of their artistic life.

I think of my work to date as situated within the post-minimalists of the 1970's, with an ancient color palette and contemporary ideas of objects made and found. Robert Ryman, Agnus Martin and the artist, philosopher and social critic, Issa Samb are artists to whom I have been indebted. Ryman and Martin helped me to pay attention to the making of my work, be it in the process and/or through careful attention to materials. Samb has taught me to see and think about objects differently. He has helped me to understand objects as having a life, a history, and how they are capable of being in relationship to other objects and people in the world. I add to the post-minimalist conversation my use of music as a catalyst for ideas and by using materials from the contemporary world.

OBJECT LESSONS

by

Linda A. Kent

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APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My thesis work, '*OBJECT LESSONS*' was a body of work exploring the intersection of visual art with music, systems and data, relationships between objects, and my interest in mimetic painting and disappearance.

Music is almost always present in my work, whether on a conscious or unconscious level. Rhythm, balance, structure, volume and timing are present in both music and the visual arts and are a constant reminder to me of their connections. To translate these elements back and forth, from playing to making and from hearing to seeing has become one of my primary challenges.

I am drawn to systems found in music, in numbers and language. When using an established data system, for example telephone numbers from a city directory, or figures from a musical score, I think of ways of re-formatting the information into a work of contemporary visual art. It is a translation between one language to another.

For example, to translate numbers which constitute a musical chord to a means of measurement for an entire sculptural piece, opens a new arena for rethinking how the abstract idea of musical symbols can be made manifest in the world.

On a formal level, my work often exists in two parts. This duality in formal organization, whether in writing, music or art is an important aspect of how I understand my work to exist in the world. The two parts are in relationship to each other and propose questions to me and the viewer. I make objects and then use them as subjects for paintings. My objects therefore function as both object and subject. When finished, they are displayed together, the objects and their responses remain in relationship.

The very last piece I made for the exhibition was made in the gallery. It was site specific drawing made directly on the gallery wall next to its subject, rusted piano wires. I did this knowing that it would have to be erased after the show was finished. This had a direct relationship to my experience of making music, as I will discuss further in the final chapter of this thesis. I will also go into more detail in the following pages of how the elements I have introduced are crucial to my way of thinking about and making visual art as a contemporary response.

CHAPTER II
INTERSECTIONS WITH MUSIC
'VESPERS'

In the summer of 2017 our MFA class traveled to Venice for the 57th Venice Biennale. We were asked upon our return to make a work in response to a work that we saw or an experience that we had. In spite of being surrounded by some of the most important works of the contemporary art scene from all over the world, I was drawn to the city's history. My response is entitled, 'Vespers'.

For me, Venice was a place with a double history, a history of art and architecture, and of music. It was at the same moment the place of Giovanni Bellini and Titian, and also of Claudio Monteverdi and the Giovanni Gabrielli. It was my first trip to Venice and while standing in front of San Marco Basilica I conjured the music of Monteverdi, more specifically his Vespers of 1610 in my mind's ear. Monteverdi is considered to be 'the father of opera'. As that may be so, he also had a 30- year career as music director at San Marco. He composed the music for his Marian Vespers and used it as an audition piece for the job. He was awarded the position and it was the opening of this work which was accompanying me in my inner ear as I looked a long time at the church from the far end of the piazza.

My response piece was based on Monteverdi's work. In a frame containing the shape of a Greek cross, the architectural plan for San Marco, I made hundreds of solid wooden blocks approximately 3.5 inches square and one inch deep. I made a careful list of all the time signature changes throughout Monteverdi's piece and assembled the wooden blocks to this schema (Fig. 1). In this way, I gave visual form to an abstract language of musical tempo.

Included in the work, (Fig. 2) in the place of some wooden squares, were paintings of wooden squares which faced the viewer and blended into the whole structure. Sometimes only four blocks were painted on a thin board, and other times whole strips of canvas with the paintings would cover an entire row. A larger painting on un-stretched piece of canvas was also placed behind the stretcher bars and holds the place of the final painted 'square' of the piece. The result is a structure which begins as a sculptural piece and ends in paint.

The piece sits on five long pieces of wood atop two vertical cement slabs. Venice is a constructed city built on stilts and the five boards work as a nod to the musical stave upon which musical notes are written. The score of Monteverdi's Vespers of 1610 lays on a pedestal next to the work and is a reference to music as an underlying form.

CHAPTER III
SYSTEMS AND DATA:
'UNLISTED'

As my work, *'Vespers'*, was based on numerical systems within Claudio Monteverdi's music, the series 'UNLISTED' from 2017 is made up of five works using the numbers in local phone books as source material. These directories were found objects in an unused cupboard close to my studio. It was interesting to reflect upon notions of privacy and how they have changed in such a short span of time. To ask someone today for their name, phone number and address would seem outrageous but twenty years ago, all of this information was easily available in the local telephone directory. In an analog world, it was absolutely necessary for this to happen and if not, would have resulted in a very isolated existence. The current directories are slim and only contain the numbers for people who have landlines. I began to separate the names from the numbers to create a plane of ambiguity while still acknowledging human presence.

The first two panels make a diptych (Fig. 3). The numbers were separated from the names and collaged on thin Masonite boards in long thin vertical rows. According to varied distances of the viewer, they can read as both very busy and very quiet. Each number maintains a connection to a specific individual and

become towers and stacks - bricks of identities forming a block. Distance is an important factor. When seen up close the numbers are brought into focus and from far away become busy and frenetic as one huge mass.

The next panel has two layers (Fig. 4). The first layer was constructed in the same way as the Diptych but then covered with a second layer of paper from the phone book margins. This is a work of covering, masking, patching, erasing. It creates a kind of silencing of the incessant visual 'noise' of the numbers in the diptych.

Color is introduced in the third panel and the work becomes aligned with painting (Fig. 5). Thick paper is used as a backing substrate instead of Masonite panels, and the paper contains movement that cannot be expressed by the material of hard Masonite. The roughly cut edges also contribute to a sense of movement.

The fourth piece of the series was made by the strips of phone numbers being laid out in a sheet of thick glue (Fig. 6). When dried, they became a malleable sheet of plasticized numbers folded and pinned to the wall in a way that the work literally took shape and became a relief sculpture. The work takes form as a bodily manifestation; an embodiment with links to the people behind the numbers in the phone directories.

The fifth and last of the series consists of a thin strip of numbers from the directory pinned to the wall (Fig. 7). On a small table below is an analog tape recorder from the 80's. There is a connection between the analog cassette

recorder and the analog phones used in the same time. The viewer is invited to press 'play' on the cassette tape and hears recorded sounds of the list of numbers being dialed on my iPhone 5S. This work also contains a musical aspect. Each dialed number has its own unique tone based on the note, D. Much research was done by telecommunications companies to find the right frequencies of pitches that would be unique to each number but also neutral enough not to distract.¹

¹ <https://blogs.unimelb.edu.au/sciencecommunication/2012/10/17/melody-behind-phone-numbers/>

CHAPTER IV
RELATIONS BETWEEN OBJECTS:
'SINE NOMINE'

I use two kinds of objects in my practice; constructed objects and found objects. Issa Samb, the contemporary Senegalese artist speaks of found objects in this way: "Once you reach to the ground and pick up an object, you are in a relationship.² I feel connected to objects in ways I can only talk about through making. They pose so many questions which guide my work: did I find the object or did the object find me? Does the object contain the aura of its own history? What about the aspect of geological time? Is it arrogant for a contemporary artist to even think of being in relationship with something so ancient as stone or metal while, compared to the history of the object, our presence is a drop in the ocean?

In the series, SINE NOMINE (Latin for 'without a name') I used both constructed and found objects as starting points for making mimetic paintings (Fig. 8, 9). As the objects I made had never had a history of function in the

² La Coquille. Conversations entre Issa Samb et Antje Majewski. Dakar 2010

world, and the objects I found were scraps from which their functional history was obliterated, I preferred for them to remain nameless.

The objects and paintings are displayed together because I am interested in the questions they pose to each other and to the viewer (Fig.10). What does it mean to place an object next to its mimetic painting? What does it mean in 2018 to make a mimetic painting of an object? Is it meant to work as a mirror?

I did not 'use' the object solely in order to make a painting. The object was not solely an opportunity for me to paint. It holds its own presence in the world and was crucial to the formation of another piece. Therefore, it would make no sense for my paintings to be in the world without their object next to them.

In the history of mimetic painting, we rarely get to see the original objects from which paintings have been made. It is as though they have served a purpose and are no longer needed. That is not the case with my work. I think of my works as couplets or duads. They are small binary pieces which go together like an A and B part of a musical composition.

The paintings are not trompe l'oeil works. They are not there for a comparison of likeness. They are put together to encourage conversation and questions. How has the object (Fig.11) been changed after it has served as subject for the painting? What does the painting now do for the object? Is it elevated? Is it more precious, is it to be taken more seriously? What part does it play in the "grand" history of painting as a medium?

CHAPTER V

FIGURES FROM ST MATTHEW PASSION

One of the central pieces from my thesis show was a collection of pieces made from the figured bass in the keyboard part of the St Matthew Passion of Johann Sebastian Bach (Fig.12). The project was begun during Lent of 2018 and was started because of a previous connection I had with the music of that liturgical time of year. Usually in Lent, the forty days before Easter, in Melbourne I would have been involved in rehearsals of the St John Passion, the St Matthew Passion or the Easter section of Handel's Messiah. This year I missed playing that wonderful music as part of the liturgical year. I ordered the score of the St Matthew Passion only to 'read' it and play through it in my head. It was then that I realized the possibilities of using the numbers in a different way from how I had experienced them in the past. This year, I was to *play* the St Matthew Passion in an entirely new way.

The figures below the bass line were a baroque short hand system to let the harpsichordist know what chords to play. The right -hand part was left empty for the keyboardist to improvise a part according to the numbers. After listing the numbers from the first movement, I began making small sculptural objects in strict accordance with the numbers as measurements. For example, the first

chord, 8/4/2 was rendered as a piece in three parts, one part of 8 inches, the next four, followed by 2 (Fig. 13).

Another figure in the score was 6/4 (Fig.14). The 6/4 chord, or, in musical parlance, the chord in second inversion, is an unstable chord. It is top heavy and wants to fall into its resolution, a 5/3 chord. I made this chord top heavy and set it precariously on the edge of a shelf to best accentuate its unstable quality. I included seven of these chordal pieces in the show, along with three drawings of them.

All of the materials were made and selected to be in accordance with the quality of each chord. Some chords are consonant, some dissonant, etc. For the dissonant chords, I added sharp wire and sand paper to the structures and, in contrast, the consonant chords were made of softer wood and twine. The result was an invention of another kind of language alongside the language of music and the language of numbers.

The decision to make drawings of some of the sculptures was not entirely my decision. The drawings were made from a place of grief, as one of my friends in the UK died in a car accident that left both my husband and I truly lost. I needed to be still and quiet for a long while. Drawing is a very intimate and personal act. And it became important as a way to accept the unacceptable and to pay tribute to my friend. Perhaps in the end that is why the corner which contained the chords, the drawings and the small sculpture on a pedestal began

to resemble an altar complete with the drawings hung high in the place where Eastern Orthodox icons might have been placed (Fig.15, 16).

CHAPTER VI
DISAPPEARANCE:
RUSTED PIANO WIRES

One of the things that began to bother me late in my musical career was when musicians around me began reflecting on their best work. “My best work was in the 90’s in London when I was playing in the Purcell Quartet”, etc. The best work had disappeared. It was only in the memory of the player and her quartet members of the time. I understand the noble ideas of letting go of ego and of non-attachment from the Tibetan Mandala sand paintings which are laboriously created by the monks and then blown away. But for some reason I had a great need for something that I created to stand still, to stay in one place for more time than the acoustical reverberation of a final note.

In my final piece of the thesis show, I hung a gnarled circle of rusted piano wires, exactly as I had found them complete with several tuning pins and one piece of felt, on the gallery wall and drew their likeness (Fig 17). I found them in the foundry rubbish, or perhaps, in the thinking of Issa Samb, they found me. I drew directly on the gallery wall next to the wires with charcoal and then went over them in oil paint to create, in my usual fashion, a response to the original object.

I understood when drawing directly on the gallery wall that it would have to be erased and could not help but be reminded of my irksome complaint with disappearing music from years ago. When I finally erased the painting/drawing under a coat of white paint, I felt as though I had come full circle and the entire process of working the past two years in the MFA program had helped me to accept an important aspect of my musical work in the past. The idea of music disappearing after the final note is neither a tragedy nor any kind of loss. It is a unique quality specific to the materials and practices of that art form. It has a unique quality unlike paint, unlike wood or metal.

The work had another connection to music. When one is playing in the midst of other musicians in a trio, quartet, chamber orchestra, the music heard around you is not the gorgeous balanced product that is projected into the hall for the audience. You hear your own fingers clacking on the keys, the cellist's sweaty hands softly squeaking during a shift, the oboists breathing, the first violinist's sniffing as a sign for a downbeat, and singers spitting with their exaggerated diction. In other words, the suspension of disbelief that we are transported elsewhere by the music disappears and we are still here, still of the earth with all the earthly things.

This drawing was like that, too. From a distance, many people swore it was another three-dimensional object. When they got close they saw the 'warts and all' of the piece. It was not the same visual experience at all. The viewer

had to be 'out in the hall' to see my piece come together as it was meant to be seen.

In conclusion, my earnest wish is to continue this work in the world, to continue to find connections between visual art and music, to further explore systems and data for starting points for work, and to increase my understanding of how objects work in the world through painting, even when the creation includes its own disappearance.

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Figure 2. *Vespers*, 2017



Figure 3. From *Unlisted*, paper collage on board, 4' x 5', 2017



Figure 4. From *Unlisted*, paper collage on board, 2.35' x 5', 2017



Figure 5. From *Unlisted*, paper collage on watercolor paper, 3.7 x 5', 2017



Figure 6. From *Unlisted*, paper collage on glue, 2017



Figure 7. From *Unlisted*, paper collage, cassette tape recorder, table, 2017

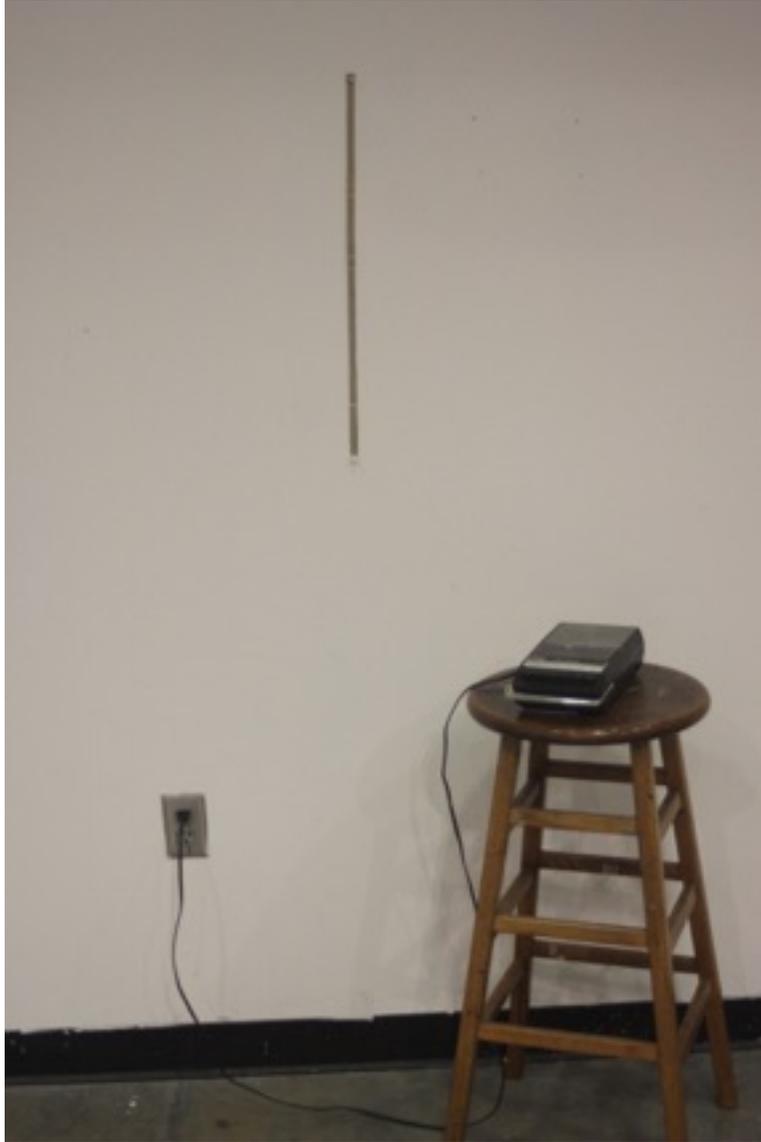


Figure 8. from *Sine Nomine*, wood, nails, oil on canvas, string, wax, various dimensions, 2018



Figure 9. from *Sine Nomine*, wood, nails, oil on canvas, string, 12"x12", 2018

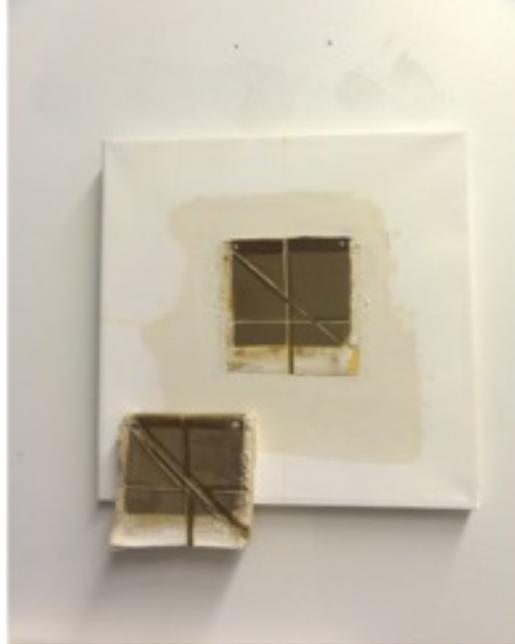


Figure 10. from *Sine Nomine*, wood, nails, oil on canvas, string, 12"x12", 2018

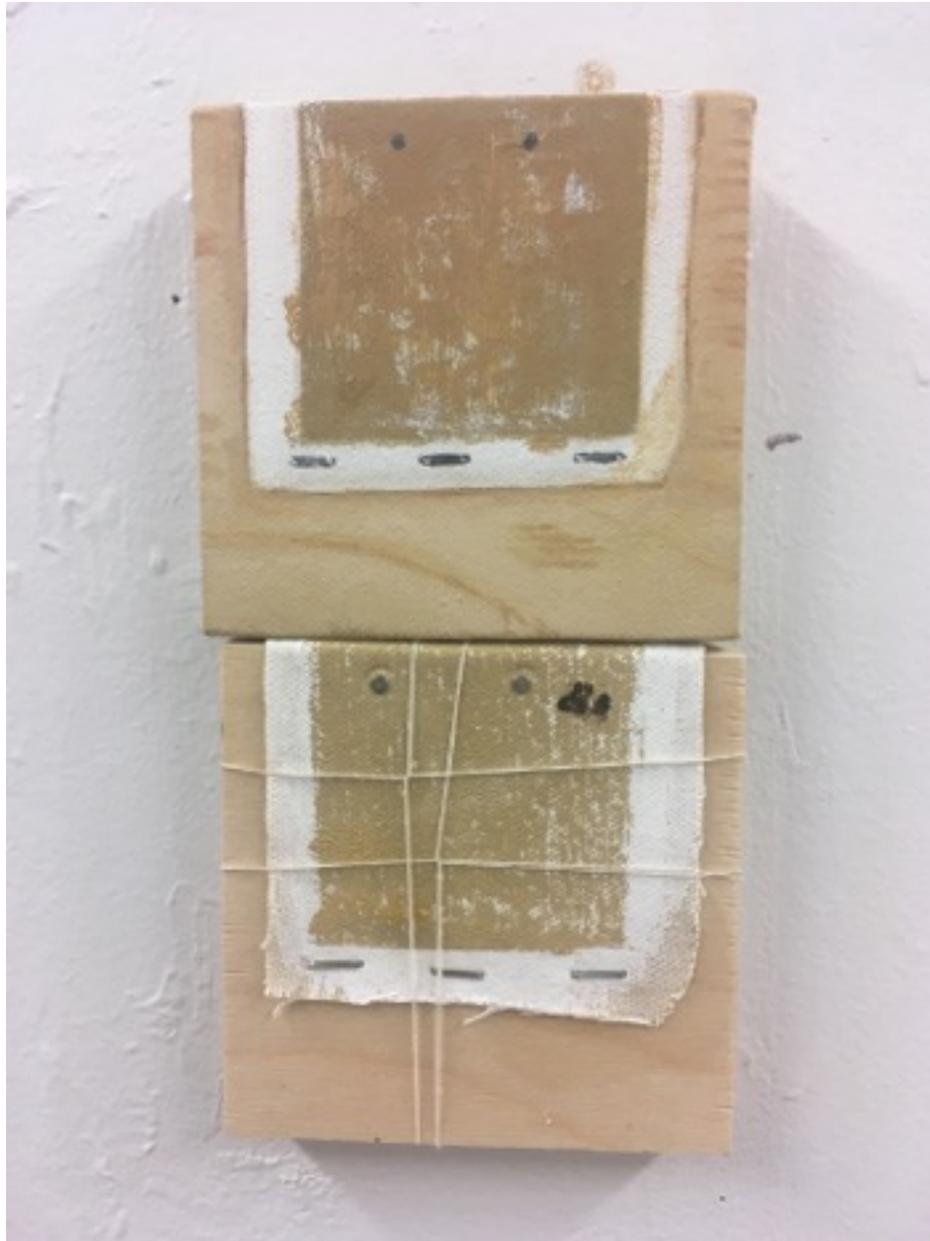


Figure 11. from *Sine Nomine*, wood, nails, oil on canvas, string, 12"x12", 2018



Figure 12. From *St Matthew Passion*, wood, metal, string, oil on canvas, 2018



Figure 13. from *Sine Nomine*, wood, nail, oil on canvas, string, 8" x 4", 2018



Figure 14. from *Sine Nomine*, wood, nails, waxed string, 6" x 4", 2018



Figure 15. from *Sine Nomine*, graphite on paper framed, 12"x15", 2018

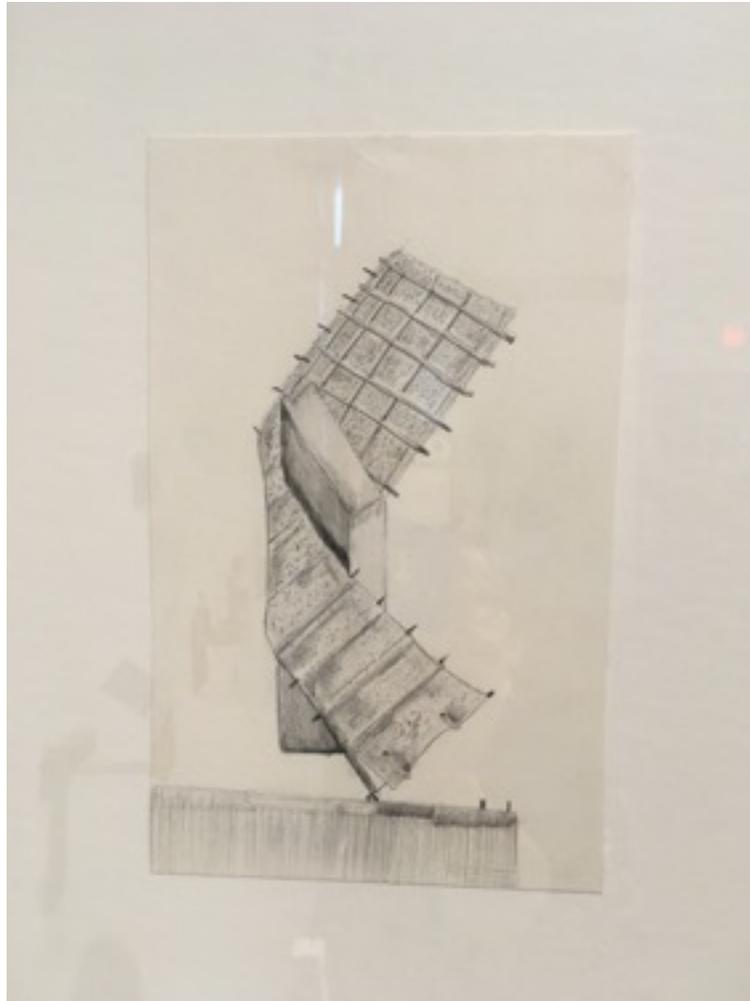


Figure 16. from *Sine Nomine*, exhibition view, 2018



Figure 17. Rusty Piano Wires, charcoal, oil pigment on wall, 2018

