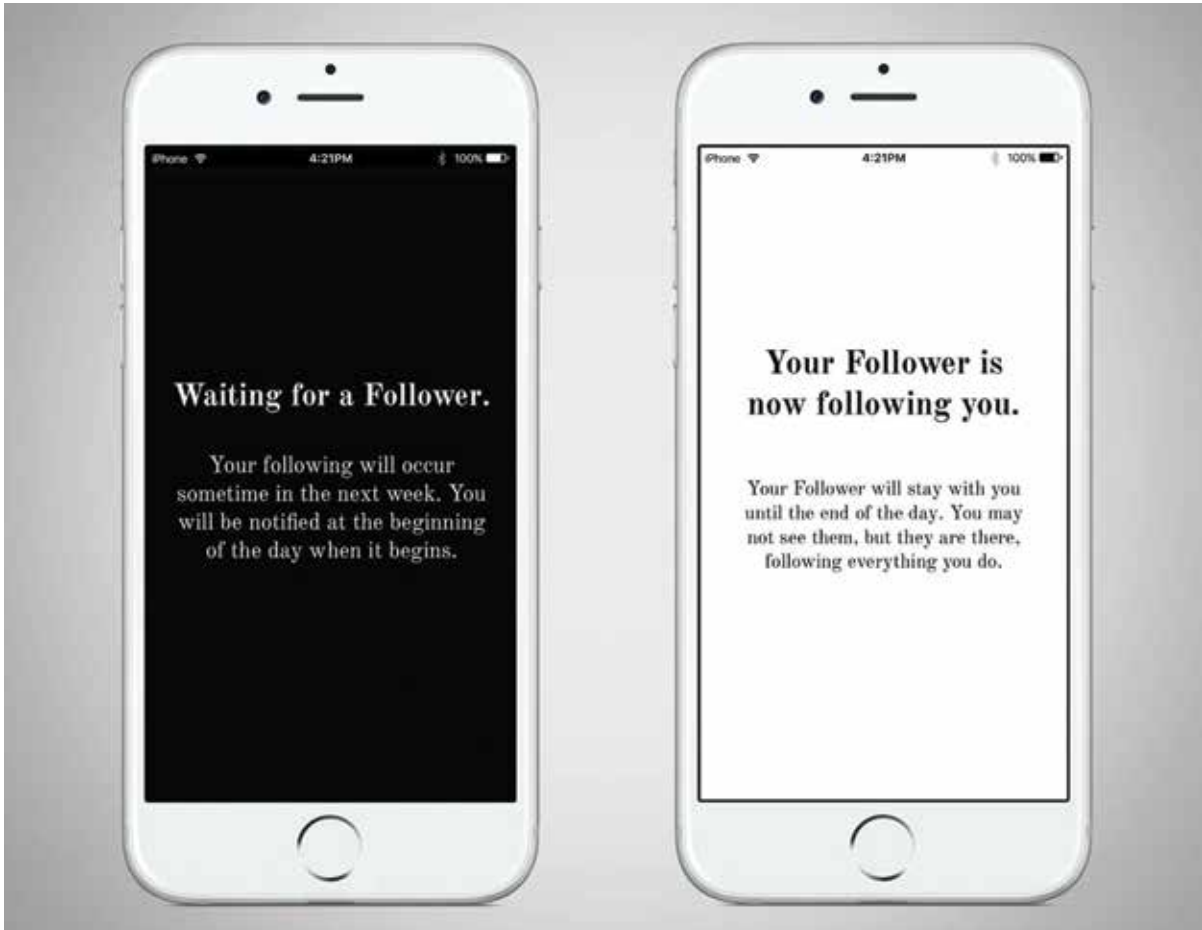


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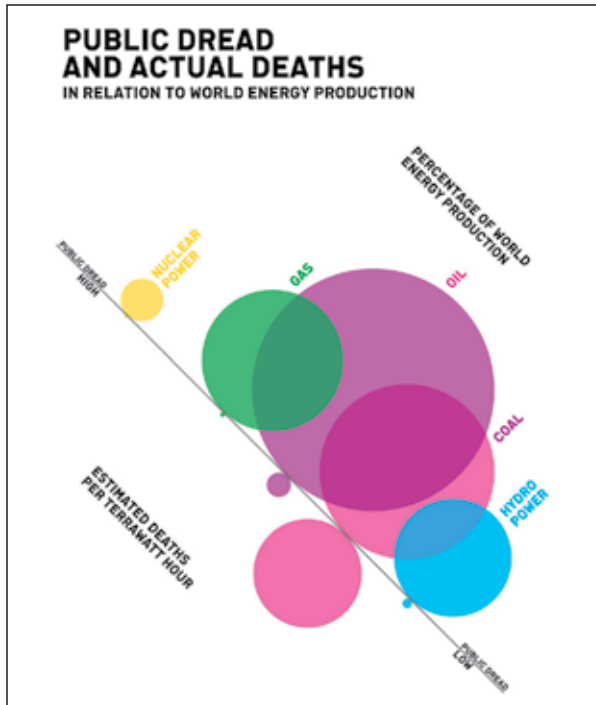
FIRST I WAS AFRAID...

Amy Archambault, Ingrid Burrington, Molly Dilworth, Sandra Erbacher, Will Gill, Susanna Hertrich, Damien Hoar de Galvan, Steve Locke, Nicole Maloof, Lauren McCarthy, and Tabitha Soren

Curated by Liz Blum

September 17 – November 19, 2017

Opening reception: Sunday, September 17, 2:00–5:00 p.m.



Susanna Hertrich *RISK III*, 2010-2011

often void of human intervention. Conjuring survivalist tactics as a way to live through disasters or catastrophic events such as creating pop-up shelters for protection or refashioning everyday materials as tools, Archambault generates spaces that aid comfort and contemplation. *You Can Survive*, (2017) is inspired by personal memories of childhood play, a fascination with curiosity, and a way to confront her fears; pages from her “survival” notebook and improvised backpack give comfort in providing ways to circumvent notions of externalized extinction and put into action a means to be the last one standing.

A vision of extinction for our species and our planet is a popular topic in fictional and nonfictional literature, theater, and film (not to mention its prominence in canonical texts of at least three major religions). For Canadian artist **Will Gill**, his video *No Man's Land* (2014), projects a dreamscape of non-linear narrative vignettes as a backdrop for a fictional character who exists in a barren arctic landscape. Through research while attending a residency in Norway, Gill discovered that it is forbidden to die in the town of Longyearbyen, Norway, because permafrost makes burials impossible. Based on that unusual decree, Gill conjures a different kind of isolation where his young character—through imagination and dreams—passes through life and reintegrates poetically back into the landscape where he was born and grew up.

Flags stand as emblems for countries and destinations; they signal hazards, and mark victories. We can all picture the lone survivor on a deserted island frantically waving a flag to a passing ship or plane in the hope of being rescued, but for artist **Molly Dilworth**, flags have political implications. Her recycled sails in *Flag State/Red 8 & 9* (2014) are formal abstractions—red rectangles of hand-sewn cloth that vary in their construction by way of internal sections of shape and pattern. They serve as a way to educate and create activism as



Will Gill *No Man's Land*, 2014

a means to oppose corporate power and commercial entities that exert questionable practices towards their workers. The flags also serve as a beacon for hope and recognition to those unrepresented labor forces who are scared and frustrated. Dilworth writes, “These handmade flags might not change anything, but they’re made in the spirit of shaking a skinny fist at the sky in rage, and ideally I may not be able to fix anything but I can channel my anxiety into sewing [thousands of feet, over many years] these things that go out in the world and generate conversation [usually one-on-one] about our complicated present moment.”

We are all discomfited by the ubiquity of surveillance in the modern world—traffic cameras spy on us when we drive, security cameras when we shop, and omnipresent CCTVs when we just go about our daily routine. Privacy seems a thing of the past—our personal lives play out in the public domain. Examining the relationship between attention and



Molly Dilworth *Flag State 9 (Red)*, 2014



Damien Hoar de Galvan *something could happen at any moment*, 2010-2017 (detail)

surveillance is the basis of artist **Lauren McCarthy's** app, *Follower* (2016). McCarthy allows a user to summon a real-life follower for the day. The fear of being followed is turned into a deliberate embrace of being watched—paranoia replaced by attention-getting. Does “hiring” a follower for the day and having one’s every move witnessed provide proof of one’s existence? Does the experience change fear of being watched into a desire for the same, asks McCarthy?

Technology has created the desire to be constantly connected to our personal devices. We keep updated via social media platforms, we obsessively check our phones for the latest trends and the latest news. This behavior has been noted and codified with the acronym FOMO: “fear of missing out”. Understood as a mental health syndrome, FOMO is characterized as apprehension or ‘social angst’ from knowing that others are having productive and fruitful experiences away from one’s self. Though artist, writer and researcher **Ingrid Burrington's** *The Center For Missed Connections* (2009–2011) predates FOMO, her work chronicles the idea of missed opportunity and dislocation. It began as an overzealous study of Craigslist *Missed Connections* section, ads for the lonely, hopeful and romantic. It ended with Burrington asking, “What’s the loneliest place in any given city, and how can I measure it?” *Center For Missed Connections* presents statistics identifying where the most missed connections happen in any given city in graphic data, maps and workbooks. While Craigslist serves as a way to connect people, Burrington’s focus is on the bad timing, missed romance, and lost opportunities that keep us apart. Similar to our reactions to McCarthy’s *Follower*, we feel a sense of empathy towards the subjects, and wonder if FOMO applies to them.

An extreme fear or aversion to something is usually defined as a phobia. Phobias can be towards a particular object, types of

objects, or situations. Phobias can be debilitating and have life-altering outcomes. The term “atychiphobia” is fear of failure; lacking the confidence or not believing in the ability to do something because of the likelihood of failing. We each have different definitions of failure based on our own individual, personal attitudes, goals, ambitions, beliefs, and values. Artist **Sandra Erbacher** looks at failure in the office or workplace environment. Rather than focusing on an employee’s actions or level of competence as a source of failure, she instead examines the institutional environment itself and shifts the locus from the worker to the tools and objects they use. Both *Fan* (*Concrete Poetry*), (2014), and *Ctrl + Alt + Del* (2015) are common items found in most offices but here they are transformed into objects failing to perform their task. Filled with poured concrete, *Fan* cannot circulate air and the blank keyboard *Ctrl + Alt + Del* cannot provide a means to create text. Erbacher calls

this “material failure” showing the “inadequacy of the object or image to reveal its history and former or indeed current function.”

Feeling fearful or being in a constant state of dread can



Ingrid Burrington *The Center for Missed Connections*, 2009-2011



Sandra Erbacher *Ctrl + Alt + Del*, 2015

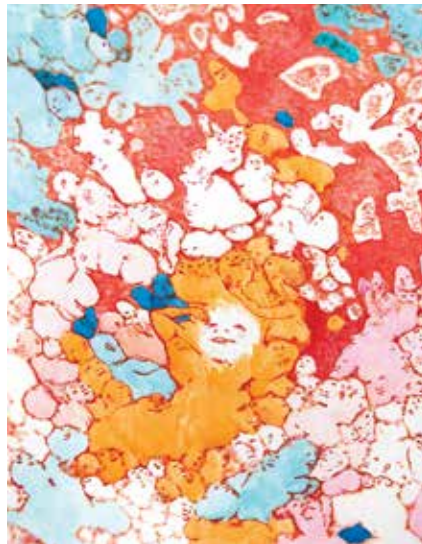
cause one's imagination to run wild and invent perils even if no real threat nor any objective justification for those feelings exists. In the drawing installation *fear, guilt, anxiety, frustration, anger and happiness*, (2008-2017) by Boston artist **Damien Hoar de Galvan** we see text scribbled on scraps of paper that reads as "message in a bottle" statements reflecting humor, pathos and also hopefulness.

These momentary scripts are emotional and familiar and feel like a very public outlet of personal frustration and anxiety. In de Galvan's other installation, *something could happen at any moment*, (2010-2017), we encounter a similar expression of emotions but this time presented as an installation of maquette-like sculptures contained within small boxes that appear to either teeter on the edge of balance or project a strange sense of uneasy material collaboration. Constructed from recycled materials or from whatever happened to be at hand in the studio, de Galvan plays upon formal traditions in sculpture-making by juxtaposing materials that barely cohere or feel stable together. His process creates an installation as off-kilter neurotic totems.

In Boston-based artist **Steve Locke's** 2017 work, *A Partial List of Unarmed African-Americans Who were Killed by Police or who Died in Police Custody During My Sabbatical from Massachusetts College of Art and Design 2014-2015*, a blue neon sign that says, "a dream" hangs high above and offset to the side of the work. The neon's blue light recalls the flashing lights on police cars and throws a bluish cast across the vinyl text on the adjacent wall. The wall text displays the date, name, gender, city, state and method of every African-American killed by police or while in police custody during the time of Locke's sabbatical. The installation feels like an elegy, soberingly recalling lives and dreams lost to violence. It is about the staggeringly large number of deaths of black citizens at the hands of police and



Steve Locke *A Partial List of Unarmed African-Americans who were Killed by Police or Who Died in Police Custody During my Sabbatical from Massachusetts College of Art and Design, 2014-2015, 2017 (detail)*



Nicole Maloof *An exercise in paranoia (a)*, 2015

of how Locke's sabbatical turned into a requiem for the victims. It is a nightmare that plays out over and over again. He says: "In the studio, I could not stop thinking about this march of death. I painted almost every day, and every day this parade of killing was on my television and radio and social media feed. Some of the dead became Twitter hashtags. Some did not, but they were no less dead."

In *The Interpretation Of Dreams* (1899), Sigmund Freud suggests "invented dreams can be interpreted in

the same way as real ones." Our dreams can conjure the process of imagination in the same way our consciousness creates artistic invention. Caliban's speech from *The Tempest* quoted at the beginning of this essay leaves it up to our imagination to interpret what he means. It could be beautiful, definitely mysterious but not hurtful. The certainty for Caliban appears in dreaming alone and that only in dreams does the true meaning of wonderment reveal itself. The work of New York artist **Nicole Maloof** explores equally mesmerizing enchantment. Her drawings are narratives that convey dreamlike notions of paranoia and anxiety. In *An exercise in paranoia (a & b)* (2015) and *The stuff dreams are made of* (2016) a mixture of half-human, half-animal creatures are mysteriously entwined with one another against backdrops drawn from the artist's personal symbolism and memory.

While recent national and international events have seemingly shifted the world towards a more precarious future path, the artists of *First I Was Afraid...* highlight aspects of anxiety, fear and dread from a more personal perspective. While the works delve into common and familiar themes of paranoia, the artists here address more abstracted impressions of emotional distress. Rather than representing "fear" by visualizing its most literal depiction, these artists make tangible their feelings through multifaceted thoughts with the hope that the more we investigate fear, the less alone we will feel. ■

— Liz Blum, 2017

BIOGRAPHY

Liz Blum is an independent curator and artist working in Massachusetts. She has curated both locally and in the New York City area with exhibits dedicated to exhibition-making that is deeply rooted in the relationship between intellectual and artistic production. Her recent initiative F. L. O. A. T. Freeing The Location Of Art Team is a freelance curatorial practice that engages and introduces audiences to pop-up exhibits that work with local communities, established galleries and art institutions. Blum has contributed writing to *On Contemplation*, *ELSE The Journal of International Art, Literature, Theory and Creative Media* Transart Institute 2016, *Photographic Powers*, Aalto University/Aalto ARTS Books, Helsinki, Finland. Her work may be viewed through online registries such as NURTUREart, Pierogi Flat Files, in Brooklyn, NY, and at her website at lizcooperblum.com.

CHECKLIST

AMY ARCHAMBAULT

YOU CAN SURVIVE..., 2017
Sketchbook reproductions
8 x 10 inches

YOU CAN SURVIVE..., 2017
Mixed media
40 x 20 x 12 inches

PLEASE TAKE YOUR SEAT, 2017
Mixed media
6 x 3 x 4 feet

Courtesy of the artist

INGRID BURRINGTON

THE CENTER FOR MISSED CONNECTIONS, 2009-2011
Poster
18 x 24 inches

THE CENTER FOR MISSED CONNECTIONS, 2009-2011
Field books
4 x 5 inches

Courtesy of curator

MOLLY DILWORTH

FLAG STATE 8 (RED), 2014
Recycled sails
55 x 72 inches

FLAG STATE 9 (RED), 2014
Recycled sails
55 x 72 inches

Courtesy of the artist

SANDRA ERBACHER

DICE, 2016
Archival inkjet print
20 x 25 inches
Courtesy of the artist

CALENDAR, 2016
Archival inkjet print
20 x 25 inches
Courtesy of the artist

FAN (CONCRETE POETRY), 2014
Archival inkjet print
43 x 60 inches
Courtesy of GRIN Gallery, Providence, RI

CTRL + ALT + DEL, 2015
Archival inkjet print
22 x 42 inches
Courtesy of GRIN Gallery, Providence, RI

WILL GILL

NO MAN'S LAND, 2014
Single channel video
2:26
Courtesy of the artist

SUSANNA HERTRICH

RISK I – III, 2010 – 2011
Digital print on canvas, beechwood,
paint, hooks, cord
39 x 47 inches
Courtesy of the artist

DAMIEN HOAR DE GALVAN

*FEAR, GUILT, ANXIETY, FRUSTRATION,
ANGER AND HAPPINESS*, 2008-2017
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable

*SOMETHING COULD HAPPEN AT ANY
MOMENT*, 2010-2017
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

STEVE LOCKE

*A PARTIAL LIST OF UNARMED AFRI-
CAN-AMERICANS WHO WERE KILLED
BY POLICE OR WHO DIED IN POLICE
CUSTODY DURING MY SABBATICAL
FROM MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF
ART AND DESIGN 2014 – 2015*, 2016
Vinyl text, latex paint
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

A DREAM, 2016
Neon, glass, wires
14 x 38 x 8 inches
Courtesy of Samson Projects, Boston, MA

NICOLE MALOOF

AN EXERCISE IN PARANOIA (A), 2015
Ink & watercolor pencil on digital
inkjet print
26 x 20 inches

AN EXERCISE IN PARANOIA (B), 2015
Ink & watercolor pencil on digital
inkjet print
26 x 20 inches

THE STUFF DREAMS ARE MADE OF,
2016
Crayon and acrylic on polypropylene
60 x 72 inches
Courtesy of the artist

LAUREN MCCARTHY

FOLLOWER, 2016
Single channel video
1:55

*FOLLOWER, I WANT TO BE SEEN JUST
FOR ONE DAY*, 2016
Digital inkjet print
5.5 x 11 inches

*FOLLOWER, I COULD REALLY BENEFIT
FROM A LITTLE EXTRA SUPPORT*, 2016
Digital inkjet prints
5.5 x 11 & 14 x 17 inches

*FOLLOWER, BECAUSE YOU'LL ENJOY
ME*, 2016
Digital inkjet prints
14 x 17 inches

*FOLLOWER, I WANT TO TELL A STORY
WITH NO WORDS*, 2016
Digital inkjet prints
14 x 17 inches

Courtesy of the artist

TABITHA SOREN

RUNNING, ELIZABETH, 2012
C-print
28 x 36 inches

RUNNING, JOHN, 2012
C-print
28 x 36 inches

RUNNING, DAVE, 2012
C-print
36 x 46 inches

RUNNING, LAURA, 2012
C-print
36 x 46 inches

Courtesy of the artist

Cover: **Lauren McCarthy**, *Follower*, 2016

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to the artists for participating and contributing their work to this exhibition. It has been my privilege and honor to work with them. I would also like to thank Ricki Singer for her continued support and encouragement. I wish to thank the staff of Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs—Noah, David and Karen Dorsky and Chelsea Cooksey—for this opportunity and for their advice and support in the planning and realization of this exhibition. Finally, my thanks to Deborah Rising for the design of the brochure.



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11-03 45th Ave., Long Island City, NY 11101 | T: 718 937 6317 | F: 718 937 7469 | E: info@dorsky.org | www.dorsky.org

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