





# **kartz ucci—an opera for one**

The Art Gym at Marylhurst University

kartz ucci—an opera for one  
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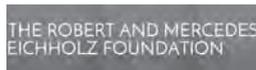
*kartz ucci—an opera for one* accompanies the exhibition of the same name, curated by Blake Shell, the Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Director and Curator of The Art Gym and Belluschi Pavilion at Marylhurst University, on view from October 4 through December 5, 2015.

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## Iterations, Translations, Poetry, and Music

Kartz Ucci's (1961–2013) work was diverse in media and method. For all her ways of approaching ideas, she was often engaged in translation—between languages, between mediums, between technologies and emotions, between color and sound. Her own work was a translation, iteration after iteration. This made the process of creating her retrospective challenging, but ultimately deeply connected all of us who were involved with Kartz's practice and with her mind. *Which is the final piece? Do we realize this remaining unfinished work or show the last version? How do we envision what she would want for this show?*

Kartz was always moving forward and always looking back, striving for new ways of approaching the subjects and concepts that drove her. She was not looking for the easy or the simple; she wanted the truthful and the meaningful. Her continued reinvestigation of the same projects was not a compulsion as much as it was a sign of her ongoing reflection on the world and her work.

There are things lost in translation, but there are things gained in it as well. Unexpected meanings and connections, the voice of the author, the very choice of what and when to translate inform the meaning of any work. As Kartz worked, each piece led to the next. She'd want to use a new material to present a past work, or she would see a new thread to follow. She'd think of a bolder or subtler way to get to the same place, and sometimes she'd want to exhibit different versions of the same piece together.

This is not the mind of someone focused on an end result. She presented beautiful and fully realized installations and works in her life. At the same time, Ucci was always revisiting, reinvestigating, rehonoring, and remaking her works. There is beauty in that—someone who is making work as if in sand to blow away, but who is using TVs and vinyl and sound instead. And who gets up the next day to begin/continue.

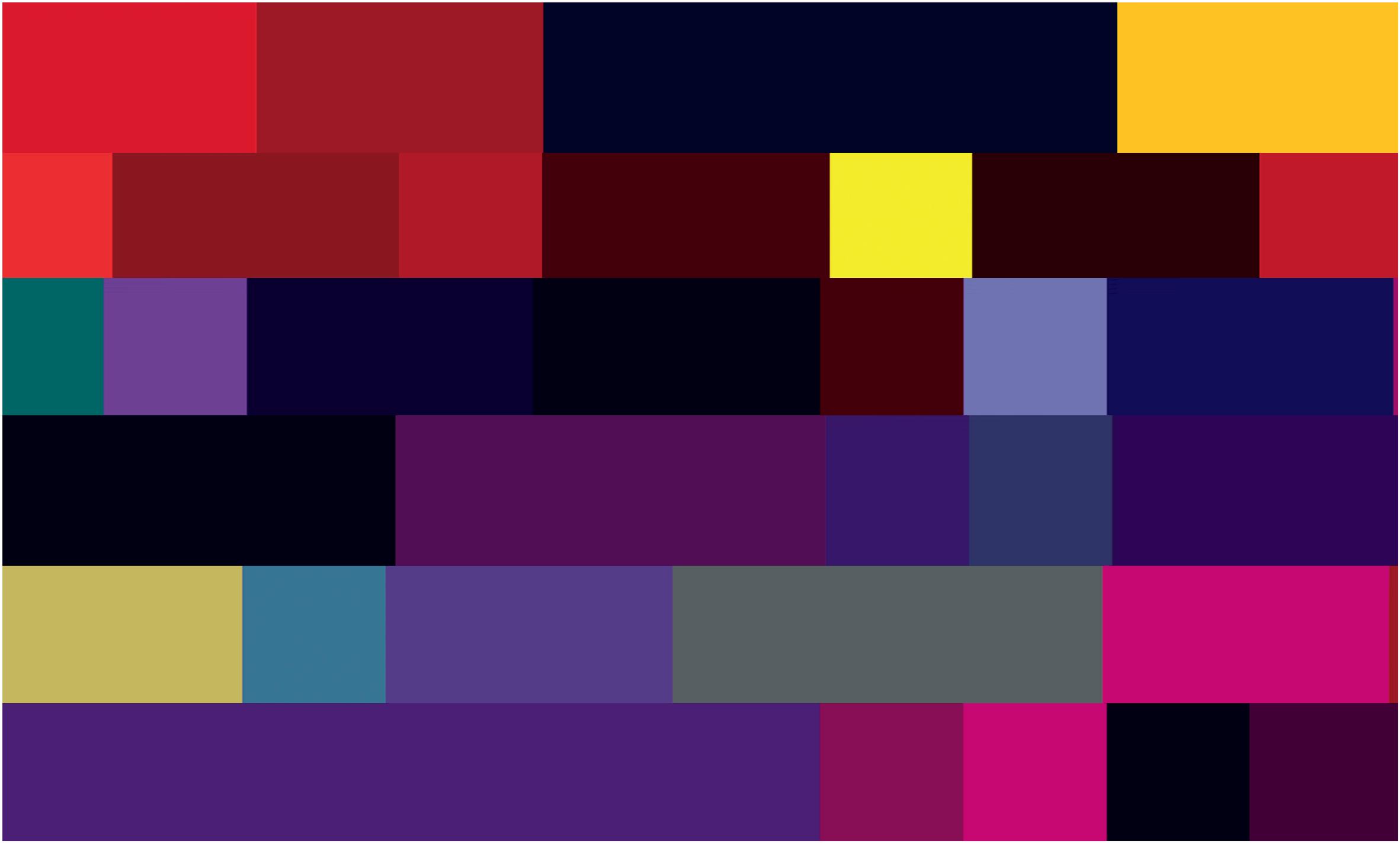
We all wish Kartz were here for this show. We'd all like to hear what she wants to do next—the latest idea or the latest reworking. I wish I could see all the versions of *an opera for one* that she would have made if she'd had a longer life. How beautiful would it have been to see a show of each iteration in the gallery, full of life and energy and variety and repetition, one after the other?

I know she wasn't finished with her work, but I also know she never would have been. This is just another iteration.

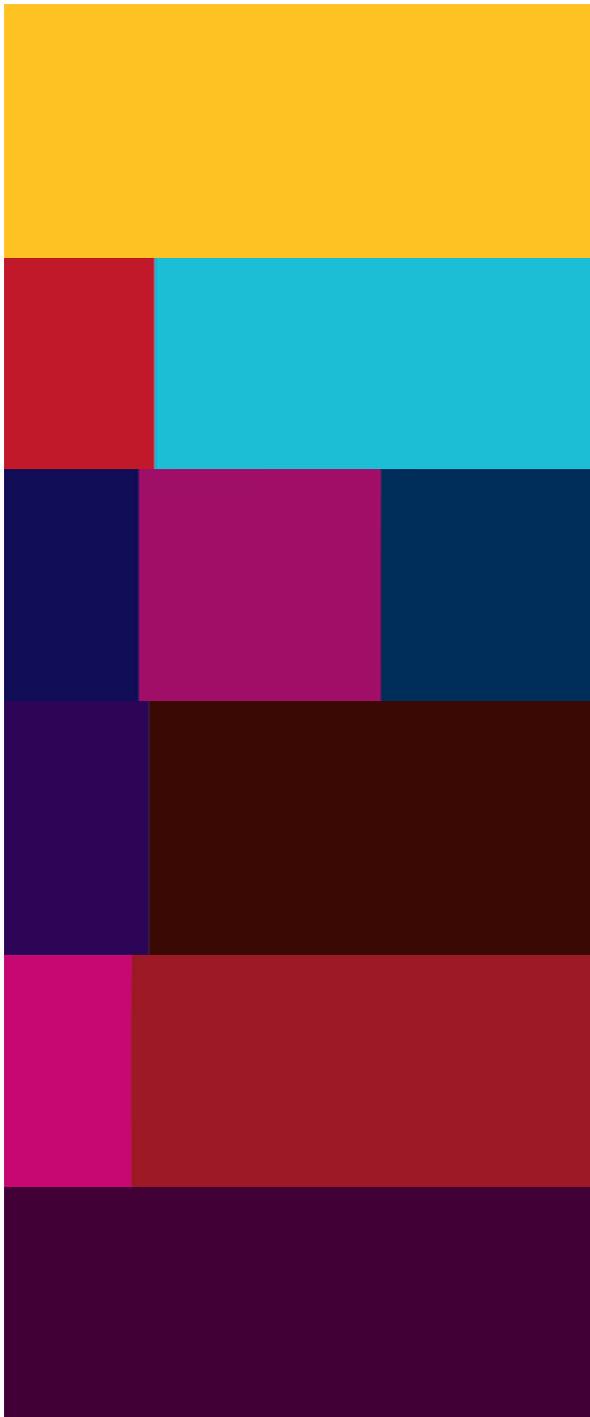
—Blake Shell, *The Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Director and Curator*  
*The Art Gym and Belluschi Pavilion*

20 poems of love and one desperate song  
#13 in a series of 21 prints  
archival ink on archival paper  
2004–05  
11 x 17 inches

Between the lips and the voice, something is died.



an opera for one, an opera for scriabin, detail of color selections from original files by Kartz Ucci



## Kartz Ucci's *an opera for one*: Hearing Color, Seeing Sound

Years ago, I knew an artist who discovered a new color, one that had not yet appeared on the known spectrum. Glimpsed only in his dreams, it disappeared when he awoke. I thought of that elusive and ecstatic experience when, in 2009, Kartz Ucci installed *an opera for one* in a small gallery at Portland Community College's Rock Creek campus, as part of Tilt Export's exhibition program.<sup>1</sup> The presentation was simple. In the darkened gallery, a digitally constructed image of a simple bench and empty screen was projected onto a wall, with a slightly oblique point of view, so that the viewer was off-center, as if standing on the side of an empty room. From a single overhead speaker, one heard a woman's voice. As she sang, a range of chromatic hues suffused the bench and screen, each color hovering just long enough for one to apprehend before it shifted. To experience *an opera for one* was, for me, the equivalent of hearing color and of seeing sound—as close as I could get to encountering a new hue, or of being able to experience synesthesia. *An opera for one* was both transcendent and raw—a cool presentation of a passionate performance. It is this combination of the theoretical and the spontaneous that marks much of Ucci's work.

Like many visual artists and musicians, Ucci was fascinated with the idea of synesthesia, and of ascribing acoustic and emotional qualities to colors. Much of her work—in particular that involved in developing *an opera for one*—involved an exploration of synesthesia's history, both in visual art and in music. Ucci was trained as a filmmaker and videographer, but she also had a lifelong passion for language and for systems of belief, including those based in religion, pagan culture, and folklore. She was always interested in how the spiritual—here defined as the invisible and unknowable—could be manifested through the media of sound, word, and color. Her research led her to consider various writings and systems of synesthesia, looking at sound-color notations developed by figures as diverse as Isaac Newton (in 1704), Alexander Scriabin (in 1911), and contemporary filmmaker and artist Steve Zieverink (in 2004). Ucci also studied Spanish mystic St. Theresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle* (1577), with its descriptions of colors that correlate to the stages of spiritual ecstasy. While all these sources were important as background material, Ucci ultimately devised her own synesthetic system to link sound and color. It was this algorithm that allowed her to create *an opera for one*.

In her artist's statement for *an opera for one*, Ucci wrote a paragraph that sums up the approach she took to many of her projects:

*In describing my work, I would say that I have an unabashed interest in the romantic and that I prefer, though not exclusively, to work with the merging of two conceptual strategies. These are the application of a system of rules to the method of creation and the appropriation of borrowed elements for its execution. Equally important to this process is the recursive relationship between the original and its recoded meaning.<sup>2</sup>*

The “borrowed elements” in *an opera for one* come from Ucci's deep familiarity with Chilean poet Pablo Neruda's (1904–1973) *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, published in 1924. She was drawn to this volume of poems, written when Neruda was twenty years old, because of their combination of earthy eloquence and youthful passion. In 2004, she created a color-coded score for the text, and commissioned Deanna Pauletto, a young Canadian mezzo-soprano whose voice was still in formation, to sing Neruda's poems. Pauletto vocally translated the score, based on her “interpretation of the relation between color and its emotional vibration.”<sup>3</sup>

Ucci recorded this solo concert, unrehearsed and made in one take, in the eighteen-story, cement-encased stairwell of a condominium building in Toronto. She chose this location in part because of the correlations she found between its raw acoustical qualities, the direct passion of Neruda's poetry, and the spontaneity of Pauletto's unaccompanied interpretation of that verse.

The final element—the system of rules, as she phrased it, of *an opera for one*—involves Ucci's use of digital technology, the media in which she was most active as artist and as teacher. Herein lies the recursive grid that gave her the equation to visually link Pauletto's voice with its ultimate colored score. Ucci painstakingly retranslated each note of the recording into its chromatic

equivalent, and then composed a corresponding individual image of the bench and screen. These were linked together into a seamless 88.33-minute synesthetic concert. As Ucci explains in an artist's statement: "In essence the opera is a projection of a projection of a projection, three times removed from its source."<sup>4</sup>

Whether intended or not, *an opera for one* was to become one of the key pieces in Ucci's short career and emblematic of her principal ideas and methodologies: her fascination with reworking, repurposing, retranslating in the interest of adding new layers of significance and meaning to a found text. Its 2009 installation in the Helzer Art Gallery represented a culmination of years of research and refinement—a time in which she had constantly reconfigured the same elements, in search of the perfect union of passion and structure, where each could be held in check by the other.

Over the next four years, its material served as a rich source for later works and several variations. Ucci rethought and re-presented its elements in other formats and variations. All the versions of this piece, whether conceived as prints, colored wall text, libretti, installations, performances, or video, trace back to her interest in reconfiguring appropriated materials, in devising new translations, as it were. She wrote of the importance of "a recurred semiotic relationship between the original and its re-authored form, as signified by the imposed algorithms that I use to create the material."<sup>5</sup>

Among the artists whom Ucci references as influences are, of course, such figures as Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), John Cage (1912–1992) and Yoko Ono (b. 1933). The latter two were members of Fluxus, the loosely connected international movement that coalesced in the 1960s. One of its leaders, the prescient Dick Higgins (1938–1998), coined the term "intermedia" in the 1960s to describe a new kind of mixed-media art made possible in part by the rapidly developing tools of technology. This was art that, like Ucci's, privileged idea over medium, frequently incorporated time as an element, and imposed a system of rules—a structure—over raw content. In a 1972 newsletter, Higgins wrote what might be a summation of *an opera for one*, in which Ucci

succeeded in combining visual art, music, and literature in an overarching, unique, and revelatory Gesamtkunstwerk:

*The best of art (visual and plastic, I mean) is really about seeing, not about looking at. Music is about hearing, not about listening to. And in the absence of a pure brain wave communication, literature is about understanding, not about mere words... it's only when you have a real interplay between understanding and the mechanical means—words, grammar, heard and/or seen elements—that literature can begin.<sup>6</sup>*

—Prudence F. Roberts

I would like to thank Jenene Nagy, Cris Moss, and Kathleen Murney for help with my research for this essay. I wish I had known Kartz better. The days we spent working on her installation at PCC were intense, funny, lovely, and challenging: a perfect parallel to Kartz herself. She was an extraordinary artist.

1. Tilt Export (tiltpdx.com) is an art initiative founded by Jenene Nagy and Joshua West Smith.

2. Kartz Ucci, *operaforoneinstructions*, artist's statement.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ucci, "A conversation on systems and mediation, with Carla Bengston, Craig Hickman, Colin Ives, Dan Powell, KartzUcci," December 5, 2011.

6. Dick Higgins, "Seen, Heard, and Understood," *Something Else Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 5 (1972).

## ***and hopefully an audience that sings the words***

Kartz had a story about carrying a portion of her mother's? or was it her father's? ashes to Italy to be scattered over a family plot. She was fulfilling a deathbed wish, and Kartz described herself tripping and stumbling along after the uncommunicative village priest (I think we can all be pretty certain that Kartz was wearing heels) on a rocky, dusty path up and down between gravestones and mausoleums, searching for the family name under a searingly white-blue Italian sky. When the priest finally paused (he is somewhat stout and sweaty, but nonetheless imagine Bengt Ekerot as Bergman's cowed Death, slowly raising a pale finger) and pointed to the correct plot, Kartz realized that the sack of ashes she had been gripping so tightly was completely empty. During her crisscross wander-stumble blind following of the priest around the graveyard, the ashes had slowly and irrevocably trickled away through an otherwise invisible perforation in the bag. It was then that I felt the truest grief, she said.

Kartz Ucci died from brain cancer on October 6, 2013, four hundred and thirty-one years almost to the day of Saint Teresa of Avila's death, and six days before *256 shades of grey* was performed at High Desert Test Sites in Wonder Valley, California. If *256 shades of grey* was Kartz's final piece, two variations. *an opera for one. an opera for scriabin*, was second to last. Completed and exhibited in 2012, it includes what Kartz termed "a personal interpretation of composer Alexander Scriabin's color codex and Saint Teresa of Avila's text *The Interior Castle*." Saint Teresa's mystical description of the human soul as a castle formed of a single diamond or crystal, containing a multitude of variously arranged rooms or mansions, is an elaborate and fantastic creation. While sharing a spiraling sense of proliferation, here exist none of the qualifications, caveats, or ultimate futility of Borges's Library of Babel. It is true that any attempt at sketching a precise diagram proves impossible, and yet (or perhaps therefore) the reader is left with an expansive sense of wonder and vitality. If nothing else, the bewildered soul lives.

It is, I think, a thing of beauty that the date of Saint Teresa's death in 1582 is rendered forever inexact by the fact that it happened on the very night that Spain switched from the Julian to the Georgian calendar. One night lasting roughly ten as the calendar moved from 5 to 15 October, under the cover of darkness and in an attempt to align human reckoning of planetary movements with the church's preferred timetable for Easter.

After her initial diagnosis and surgery in late 2011, Kartz moved in with her sister's family in Southern California so that she could undergo gamma knife radiosurgery and other treatments in Newport

### **256 shades of grey**

Kartz Ucci with Abby Donovan and Tom Hughes  
High Desert Test Sites, Joshua Tree, California  
sound and light piece

2013

photography by Brooks Dierdorff and Jesse  
Sugarmann



Beach. At some point during this time she and a friend visited Andrea Zittel's A-Z West in Joshua Tree, California. The way that Kartz described things was pretty straightforward: she knocked on the door of Zittel's studio and told her that she had brain cancer and that she had always wanted to visit A-Z West. I am unclear as to whether Kartz and her friend spent one night or more with the artist community at A-Z West, but I do know that she made cool green and tingly smoothies for everyone to drink around the fire pit in the evening, and that Zittel told her she should submit a proposal for the 2013 High Desert Test Sites. Kartz took incredible photographs on that trip of the desert at night, a sky wide and black and thick thick thick with stars.

I have a memory of watching Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, Tom, Kartz, and I. It was a second or third viewing for all of us, and in my memory we watch it projected large at Kartz's house. Either on the wall in her living room, sitting on the leather sofa her father had made for her according to her own design, or maybe even, as we had done with other movies, projected onto a screen in the summer outside, reclining in chaise lounges with wine after dinner and then whiskey. As always, we found ourselves circling around the final scene. Does Monkey, *Stalker*'s daughter, move those three glasses across the table through psychokinesis? Or is such mysteriously purposeful shifting movement caused by the overwhelming advance of that train that shakes the final scene into darkness and oblivion?

It is interesting to think about Tarkovsky's ideas for the sounds and music in this film. Supposedly he wanted something that would create a sense of space frozen in a dynamic equilibrium, a mixture of Eastern and Western instruments, with everything (even nonmusical sounds) somehow modified or altered by the effects of a SYNTHI 100 synthesizer. According to a sales brochure distributed by EMS in 1974 when the synthesizer was introduced, the SYNTHI 100 included (among other things) twelve oscillators and two 60 x 60 patch matrices. It is perhaps not surprising that Stockhausen used the SYNTHI 100 to realize *Sirius*, his work of interplanetary rhythms and communications.

*256 shades of grey*. In the winter of 2011 Kartz hired Karl Turner, a music student at the University of Oregon, to convert the Grateful Dead's 1984 song "Touch of Grey" into MIDI files for five instruments: three guitars, bass, drums. At the same time she was creating a video that consisted of 5 shifting horizontal bands of 256 shades of computer grey. When I started working with Kartz in early spring 2013, applying for funding from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts so that we could present the piece at High Desert Test Sites in the fall, she had translated the MIDI files into WAV files for each

instrument, and she had completed the video. With a running time of 00:05:57 the video lasts the length of the song, and the greys are synched to change in relation to each MIDI file instrument.

I don't think anyone would call Kartz Ucci a Deadhead. We never heard the Grateful Dead come up on any Pandora or iTunes rotations during cocktails or dinner, and yet this Garcia/Hunter song had a special resonance. In what I like to think of as *shades of grey: take one*, Kartz played "Touch of Grey" in its entirety for her tenure committee at the University of Oregon. I picture Kartz entering stage left to place a boom box roughly center on a blandly anonymous conference table that is surrounded by her skeptical and incurious colleagues. The boom box slides a bit to the side as she tugs it in order to make the cord reach an outlet, but then she plugs it in and she turns it on and they listen to the whole damn song. In my mind Kartz is channeling David Byrne and the opening performance of *Stop Making Sense*. It's the Clash or the Beastie Boys all over again, and at the end of the day (only as always it really takes a year) the university grants promotion and tenure to Kartz.

All of those absurd skeletons. Kartz was particularly fond of the 1984 "Touch of Grey" video that originally aired on MTV. During her various treatment cycles she would ask friends and family to watch it on YouTube at very specific times, and she made her surgeon play it on the operating room monitor and speakers during her procedures. As we worked in her final months to decide the form *256 shades of grey* would take in October, ideas for projection of the video and what equipment in the sound system and possibilities for printing a book and how much to tweak the WAV files, well those things they came and went. But one thing stayed constant: she wanted the audience to sing the lyrics.

October 12, 2013. Wonder Valley, California, outside the Palms saloon and restaurant, right after sundown. The Palms sits alone by the side of the road, flanked by some tumbledown shacks, various discarded materials and vehicles, the eponymous trees. It is the desert of the American West and the world feels abandoned out there. Saturday had been stunningly hot and dry and slow, but as evening sifted down and far-off coyotes began to call, the people came.

Shot into a quickly solidifying night, the projector beam became a lighthouse beacon of sorts, illuminating dust and dirt being swirl-kicked up as the audience tripped and stumbled over rocks and tumbleweeds. "Step into the light, step into the light." Tom and I realized that is what we

were saying over and over again once we noticed that no one could read their lyric sheets when they were standing off to the sides and holding them down in the dark. Step into the light step into the light. The music was tinny and electronic with exactly the archaic computerized feel that Kartz had described. It seemed almost too fast to follow along.

Question: What happens when someone who isn't there asks a group of people to sing a song that they do not know? Step into the light step into the light.

Answer: For a time the light is filled, with fluttering white handheld pieces of paper, with the block black of human body silhouettes, with all of that dust. Step into the light.

—Abby Donovan



untitled (Joshua Tree, California)

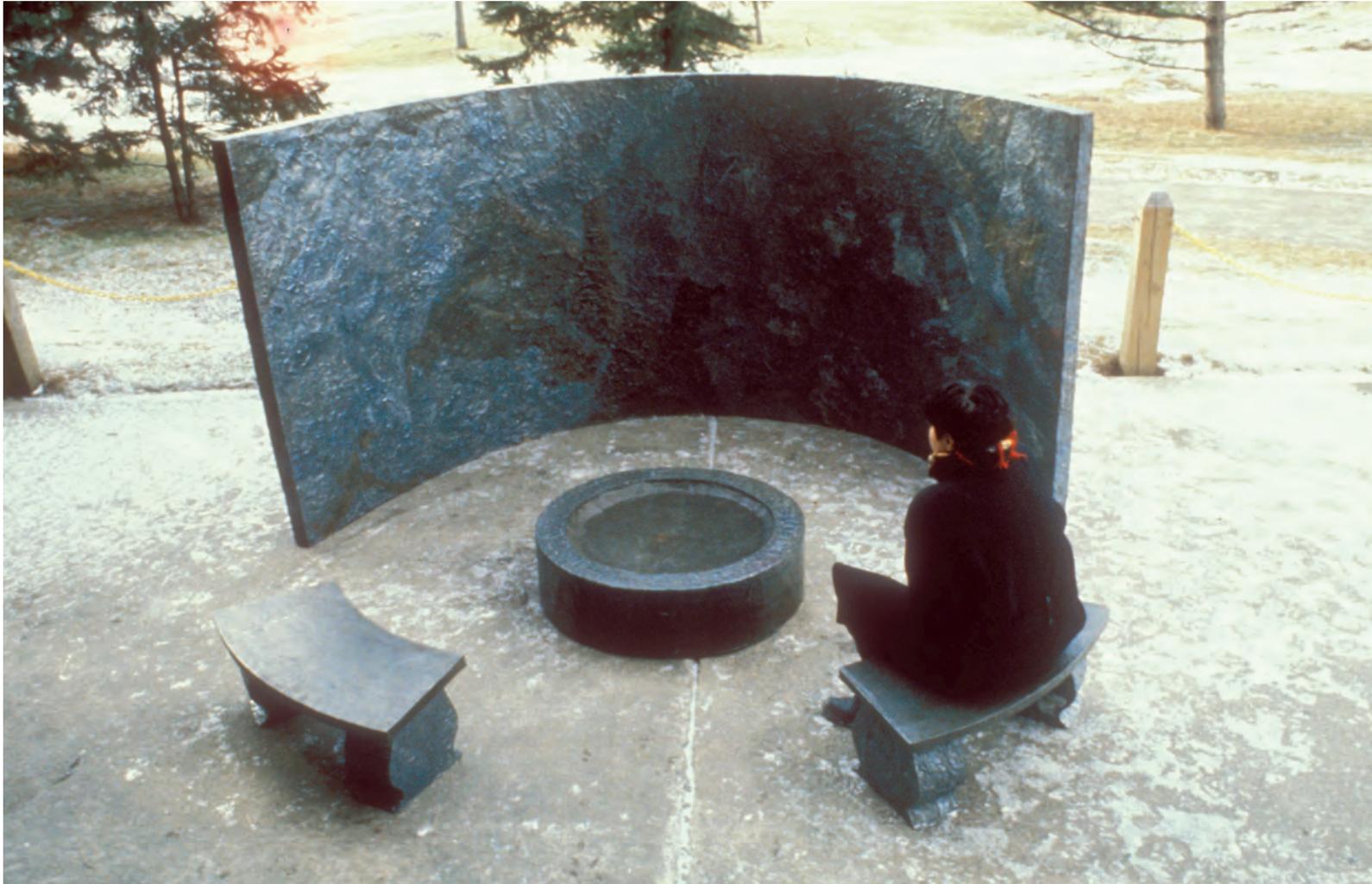
digital image

2012

Kartz Ucci



1991-2004



## installation at La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse 1991

My early work was very much driven by the concept of being between two cultures—Italian and Canadian. My parents had both lived through the Second World War in Europe, my father mostly as a prisoner of war in Siberia and my mother as a teenager in the American-occupied region of southern Italy. They immigrated to Canada in the mid-'50s; two of my siblings were born in Italy, and my brother and I were born in small northern Ontario industrial towns. In my early work I felt it was important to speak to the cultural differences that I had experienced as a child who grew up speaking only Italian at home and English at school.

This work led to my pursuit of an MA in interdisciplinary studies, which allowed me to integrate my creative practice with academic and field studies, focusing on the ethnographic hermeneutics of religious practice and pagan beliefs. My MA research evolved into an MFA in visual art, which combined feminist theory with new media, installation art, and sculpture. My approach to education reinforced and put into practice my belief that the process of making art should be a continuous amalgamation of creative material and intellectual pursuit.

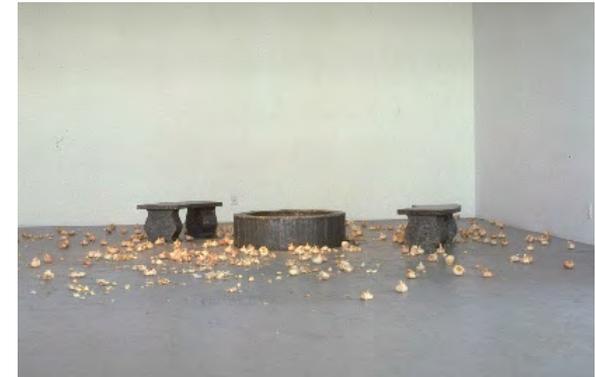
—Kartz Ucci

(title unknown)

lead wishing well and wall

1991

This earlier work is striking in the context of the later work *an opera for one*.



above:

destino

La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse, Montreal, Canada

installation view, lead wishing well

1991



above:

**residue**

Mercer Union, Toronto, Canada  
installation view, lead, cement, glass,  
feathers  
1991

right:

**mammafolksongs**

La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse,  
Montreal, Canada  
installation view, lead bedroom set  
1991



## 2 condos 1996

My father, who had a dark sense of humor, once told me he had purchased two condos—he was referring to burial plots for my mother and himself. An appropriate title, I felt, for a storefront video installation in the Queen Street West district of Toronto, a neighborhood once inhabited by immigrants that was quickly being gentrified into Toronto’s Soho, first by artists and then by retailers and developers. For this particular site, an old storefront not yet touched by development but surrounded by upscale restaurants and shops, I wanted to make a piece that expressed “old country” values, yet pointed to their fracture in this decontextualized, consumer-driven environment. I chose to document intimate, mundane, and repetitive activities that were representative of my parents’ everyday life—and I wanted each activity to possess a poignancy complicated by duration, failing health, and old age.

—Kartz Ucci



## primer 99 1999

In Old English, *primer* was a word for a book of hours, a text that prepared one for a devotional life in their everyday. In molecular biology, a primer is a nucleic acid strand that serves as the starting point for DNA replication; in an explosive, it is the detonating device; and as a general text, it is used to teach basic concepts.

This work juxtaposes a knife being sharpened, a child playing hopscotch, and a winding road. As a meditation on loss, the intent was to sharpen the knife in one session until it had all but disappeared.

—Kartz Ucci

**catfight** 1998



*page 23, top to bottom:*

**2 condos**  
dual monitor video installation, silent  
running time 30:00  
1996

**primer**  
documentation of dual projection  
running time 5:00:00  
1999  
22 x 8 feet

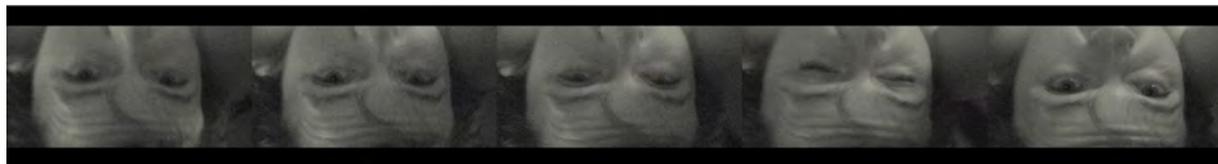
*top left:*

**catfight**  
collaborative project with Thérèse  
Mastroiacovo, video and performance  
installation view  
1998

*bottom left:*

**spin**  
silent, single-channel video  
running time 1:34:79  
2004

**spin** 2004



## wheelchair (drag) 2000

A wheelchair was dragged behind a jeep from the entrance of a decommissioned mine site, down the mining road, until it crashed. This work serves as a metaphor for the lack of consideration given to the elderly who were enticed to live in Elliot Lake, Ontario, after the uranium mines were decommissioned and the town had gone bankrupt. With a new CEO in place and investment money from Billington Mines, the town reinvented itself from the former “Uranium Capital of the World” to “Retirement Town—Canada’s Gateway to the North.” However, the town failed miserably with regard to the medical care of the elderly. This is but a small gesture toward that disregard.

—Kartz Ucci



wheelchair (drag)  
video  
running time 4:59  
2000



2003-2014

## further than everything 2006

Two central metaphors in my work are the location of desire and the pursuit of happiness. Language theory and philosophy inform my creative approach, and my subject matter is often determined by my emotional response to my physical surroundings. For example, one of the earliest works I made after locating to the University of Oregon was a neon text piece that read: “further than everything.” This work was inspired by both the literal and figurative interpretations of the words *farther* and *further*, the first indicating physical distance and the second metaphorical distance. In my piece, the text “further than everything” is a coded reference to both the location of desire and the pursuit of happiness. I was thinking of my own geographical relocation in relation to the deceased author Ken Kesey’s cross-country journey on his infamous magic bus Furthur. “Furthur” was an unintentional misspelling of “further,” painted on the bus; my appropriation of the word intentionally plays with language, refers to that historic moment, and reflects my own journey.

—Kartz Ucci

**further than everything**  
installed at Lawrence Hall, University of Oregon,  
Eugene, Oregon  
neon and steel  
2006  
48 inches x 9 feet



## (untitled) i want to be a lighthouse keeper 2008

A five-millimeter line of neon was shot with a high-definition, or HD, camera at close range. The camera was able to register subtle fluctuations in heat and light emanating from the neon. This work exists in two versions, shown here across four monitors positioned at floor level and presented as a single wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling projection with the actual neon on the opposite (facing) wall at horizon level. The audio is an amplified recording of the neon transformer. *Untitled (i want to be a lighthouse keeper)* was inspired by the Los Angeles horizon at night. In turn, the work becomes a distilled, constructed view of a horizon line that is at once alien and romantic, filled with potential yet empty. Its motion is that of particles of light and their magnetic oscillation at the frequency of the alternating electrical current.

—Kartz Ucci



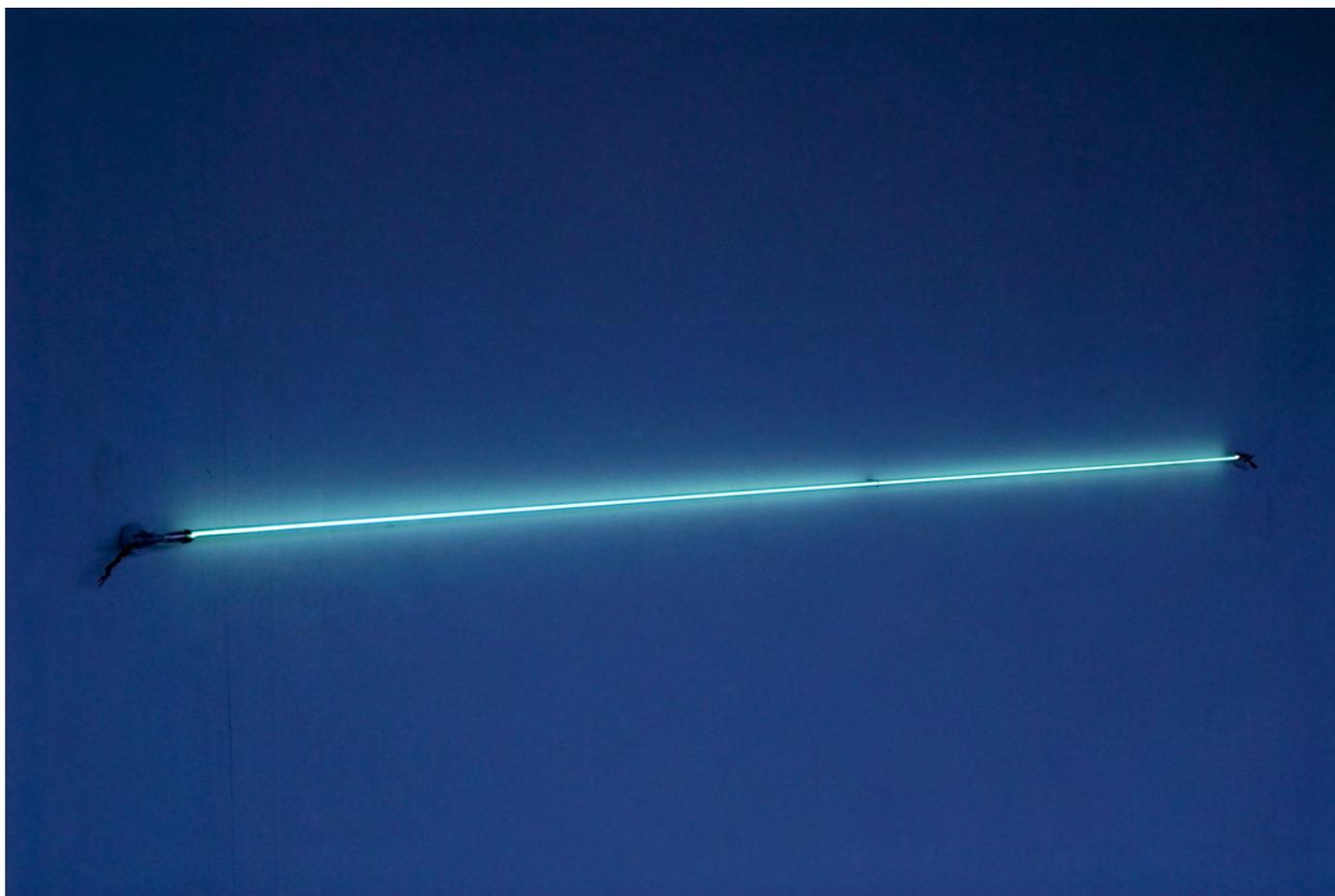
above:

**untitled (horizon)**  
production still  
2008

left:

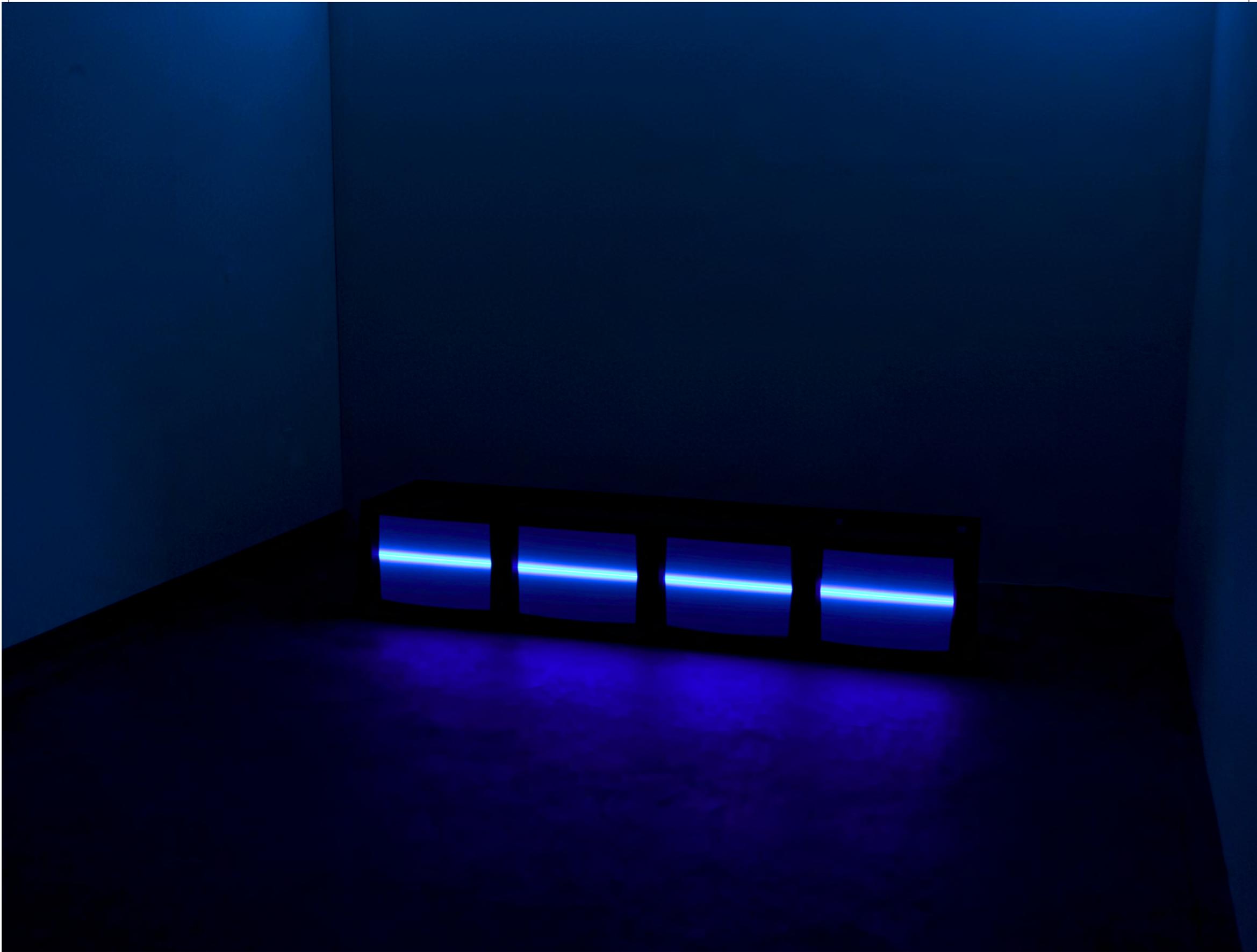
**untitled (i want to be a lighthouse keeper)**  
neon  
2007–08  
2 x 36 inches





untitled (horizon)  
neon  
2008  
5 millimeters x 48 inches

**i want to be a lighthouse keeper**  
Alpern Gallery, Portland, Oregon  
video and sound installation on 4  
broadcast monitors at floor level  
running time 20:00  
curated by Cris Moss as part of the  
Portland Biennial 2010, Disjecta  
2010  
dimensions variable





left:

**sad songs**

detail from original file by Kartz Ucci

page 38, top to bottom:

**sad but true**

Red Head Gallery, Toronto, Canada

installation view

curated by Kim Simon

2003

dimensions variable

**sad but true**

Red Head Gallery, Toronto, Canada

installation view

curated by Kim Simon

2003

dimensions variable

page 39, top to bottom:

**368 songs with the word sad in the title**

**mixed into one song**

Optica, Montreal, Canada

installation view showing the vinyl text,

record player, and sound dome

2010

**368 songs with the word sad in the title**

**mixed into one song**

Optica, Montreal, Canada

lead panel

2010

*(song) another sad l*

*llo springfield again [67] • (song) sad and dreamy (performer) alejandro escovedo (album) the boy  
rformer) cowboy mouth (album) are you with me? [96] • (song) so sad about us (composer) \*  
ie your friends [87] • (song) a bit of real sadness (performer) green,  
song) a sad song with a happy soul /*

## sad but true 2003

Happiness is not a thing, an object, a definable space or location; it's a state of being as infinite and individual as those of us who hope for it. However, Western urban living and the trappings of consumer society offer any number of ways to name, attain, and measure happiness, as though it were something concrete to grasp. It's not a new realization that everything from our education system to the entertainment industry is designed to maintain the machinery of corporate culture and the perpetual production of desire. We desire careers, homes, and nice stuff to put in those homes. We hope when we have these things we might feel at least a little happy, and also desirable to other people who want the same.

Kartz Ucci's exhibition *sad but true* seems to embody subjectivities already well immersed in this hamster wheel of the culture of desire. Setting the atmosphere for the exhibition is the sound work *368 songs with the word sad in the title mixed into one song*. As the descriptive title suggests, Ucci has created a vinyl recording of an anxious collective lament. For *sad but true*, *368 songs* is presented as if in someone's minimalist loft condo, complete with a beautiful lounge chair straight out of design and lifestyle magazine *Wallpaper* and a high-tech sound system that emits a tune to contrast with the cool comfort of the space. The compression of 368 voices trying to express an essential emotion creates a noise like channel-surfing a shortwave radio, a kind of elegant primal scream amid symbols of consumer happiness.

Ucci's *sad but true* extends its commentary on the empty promise of capitalist culture to the ownership of space itself. The hoped-for comfort and ease of living embodied in the dream of "home" is now wrapped in the reality of space as rare commodity. Ucci's aggressive vinyl wall text—"NO trespassing, sitting, eating, shitting, dog shitting, drinking, smoking GET THE FUCK OFF MY DRIVEWAY"—is taken from the view out her condo window to a back-alley doorway. "...GET THE FUCK OFF MY DRIVEWAY" points to a sense of angry alienation held within an apparent object of happiness. The notion of space as a site of happiness within urban society is shrinking. Recoiling from the possibility that living in physical and emotional proximity to each other is something to strive for, space is now just as much an image-product as the furniture held within it. Formally, Ucci's work in *sad but true* has an almost matter-of-fact air about it, but it also holds a stealthy emotional impact. Somewhere between a banal factuality and a fantasy life, *sad but true* lets out a powerful moan of frustration at the seemingly endless pursuit of happiness.

—Kim Simon, September 3–28, 2003



## 368 songs with the word sad in the title mixed into one song 2010



This exhibition was based on the record *368 songs with the word sad in the title mixed into one song*, originally recorded on black vinyl in an edition of 300 in 2003 and remastered for exhibition on clear vinyl. The record was produced by collecting the number of songs explicitly mentioned in the title. First they were downloaded off the Internet by searching for the keyword “sad” in various Gnutella<sup>1</sup> engines; then the collected MP3 files were combined in an audio-editing program to compose a new soundtrack that was transferred to vinyl. The work proposes a concrete experience of the paradox intrinsic to the quest for happiness as the end of human action: a fundamental philosophical contradiction between wishing for happiness and being at a loss for the means of reaching it or for knowing what it is.

The gallery installation included two devices articulated around the audio work: a massive panel covered by a layer of lead—its monochrome surface investing the space while improving its acoustics—and a vinyl mural of the song titles arranged in an iridescent spiral. This recurring natural symbol (a formal reminder of the LP and turntable) may be as suggestive of the infinite and cosmological as of dizzying confusion, or indeed of any expansive movement—creative spiral or dextrorotation, clockwise, according to Greek mythology; or a contracting one—the counter, so-called destructive spiral or levorotation. Here, an invisible centrifugal force dissipates the visual obstruction, hearkening back to the din that is itself slowly dissipating... Like that sensory (over)stimulation that gradually gives way to harmonious simplicity, happiness may simply be a direction, a whole rather than a summation.<sup>2</sup>

—Kartz Ucci, includes text partially excerpted from an essay by Geneviève Bédard

1. Gnutella is a decentralized peer-to-peer file-sharing network.  
2. Paul Ricoeur

**I remember when the betrayal of desire did not have a specific name I remember happiness I remember sadness I remember when I was happy I remember when happiness was not a category of truth I remember when happiness could be as soft as a caress I remember its impossibility I remember its emptiness I remember a desire to go further to be indeterminate inconsistent to live happily ever after I remember when I could name happiness I remember wondering what it is to desire I remember desire I remember living I remember when principle was something that could not be bought and sold I remember when I could not feel responsibility I remember not knowing the meaning of autonomy I remember the sound of my mothers voice I remember difference I remember not having a paranoid perspective I remember not having to count on my demands being met I remember not having to call the others bluff I remember a fundamental resistance against knowing too much I remember knowing too much I remember asking for too much I remember when happiness was not evil I remember when it was not a commodity that could be bought and sold I remember when I did not need to buy it I remember when knowledge made me happy I remember when I could not bear the prospect of dying I remember when I knew how to dance I remember laughter I remember when happiness did not have a name I remember when things were not so still I remember when I knew the difference between fleet and fight I remember what it meant to fight I remember wanting to appear critical I remember not knowing what the other knew I remember learning the difference I remember feeling small I remember forever I remember the betrayal of desire I remember an occluded heart a damaged brain and broken sight I remember knowing the difference between the spiritual and spirit I remember the dialectical process sometimes all I remember is the dialectical process I remember my inner potential I remember understanding I remember a desire to live I remember caring I remember pleasure I remember living beyond pleasure I remember freedom I remember the pursuit of happiness I remember when it had a name I remember naming it I remember living happily ever after I remember not having to confront my desire I remember joy I remember what it is like to not remember I remember being afraid to ask I remember when honesty was not selfish I remember humility I remember marginality I remember indifference I remember fear I remember a desire to know I remember learning to pretend I remember courage I remember learning to count I remember standing in line I remember being still I remember the social appearance of order I remember caring I remember being mortal I remember a willingness to save victims I remember an ordinary girl I remember going the limit I remember desire I remember being an honest believer I remember more or less everything but then I forget**





*left:*

**368 songs with the word sad in the title  
mixed into one song**

detail, mirrored vinyl text  
2010

*page 40:*

**i remember**

detail from original file by Kartz Ucci

*page 41:*

**sad songs**

detail from original file by Kartz Ucci





left:

**368 songs with the word sad in the title mixed into one song**  
clear vinyl record, acrylic turntable, and console detail  
2010  
18 x 18 inches

right:

**368 songs with the word sad in the title mixed into one song**  
wax on tin audio recording (series of 5, individually mastered)  
album cover (archival ink on archival paper)  
side a 7:02, side b extended 13:15  
2010  
12 x 12 inches

I signal red on your absent eyes that they swell as the sea to the border of a light.

While the sad wind gallops killing butterflies I love to you, and my joy bites your mouth of plum.

You have deep eyes where the night beats wings. Fresh arms of flower and lap of rose.

## 20 poems of love and one desperate song 2004–2011

*20 poems of love and one desperate song*, originally created in 2005 as a series of twenty-one prints, is a reworking of Pablo Neruda's book of poetry *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*. Moreover, the work is much indebted to the Italian film *Il Postino*, and its central character's obsession with Pablo Neruda's use of metaphors. The film inspired the design, execution, and parameters for *20 poems of love and one desperate song*. A line was selected from each poem in its original Spanish transcription and then was translated into English through the use of an online translation engine. The phrase "A veces una vela. Altas, altas estrellas" in its original Spanish becomes "Sometimes a sail. High, high stars" in its published English translation—but, through the use of an online translation engine, it transforms into "Sometimes a candle. Discharges, discharges stars." (*Poem #18*). My intention in this process was to reconsider how a metaphor translated literally brings to mind the difficulty and possibility of poetic translation. The beauty of Neruda's language, and for that matter, his metaphors, can be found through the simplest of means. For each of the twenty-one prints I produced, the line of translated text was positioned against a solid color ground, determined via the metaphor itself or Neruda's naming of a specific color in the line of poetry selected. In the recoding of texts, I am interested in working conceptually with language, the way that one might interpret a landscape with color in a painting or a drawing.

—Kartz Ucci

left:

**20 poems of love and one desperate song**  
#7 in a series of 21 prints  
archival ink on archival paper  
2004–05  
11 x 17 inches

page 46:

**20 poems of love and one desperate song**  
#14 in a series of 21 prints  
archival ink on archival paper  
2004–05  
11 x 17 inches

page 47:

**20 poems of love and one desperate song**  
#8 in a series of 21 prints  
archival ink on archival paper  
2004–05  
11 x 17 inches

channels where the eternal thirst follows, and the fatigue follows, and the infinite pain.

7. I signal red on your absent eyes that they swell as the sea to the border of a light.

13. Between the lips and the voice, something is died.

es a candle. Discharges, discharges stars.

2. Dumb, my friend, single in the solitaire of this hour of deaths.

8. You have deep eyes where the night beats wings. Fresh arms of flower and lap of rose.

14. While the sad wind gallops killing butterflies I love to you, and my joy bites your mouth of plum.

19. She made your body, your luminous eyes and your mouth glad.

3. Mark my way in your arc of hope and I will loosen in delirium my

9. Your parallel body subjects

15. Butterfly of dream, you look yourself like my core, and y

20. No longer I want it is certain, but perhaps I want it. The love is so short, and is so long the forgetfulness.

4. As while handkerchiefs of goodbye travel clouds, the win

indefinitely stuck fish to my soul.

the word melancholy.

desperate song. Oh the bitten mouth, oh the kissed members, oh the hungry t

10. I remembered to you w

16. In the network of my music y

left:

**twenty poems of love and one desperate song  
(re)defined**

Archer Gallery at Clark College, Vancouver,  
Washington

vinyl

2011

curated by Blake Shell as part of the series of  
exhibitions PERIMETER: WE LIVE HERE NOW  
organized by Terri Hopkins, The Art Gym  
dimensions variable



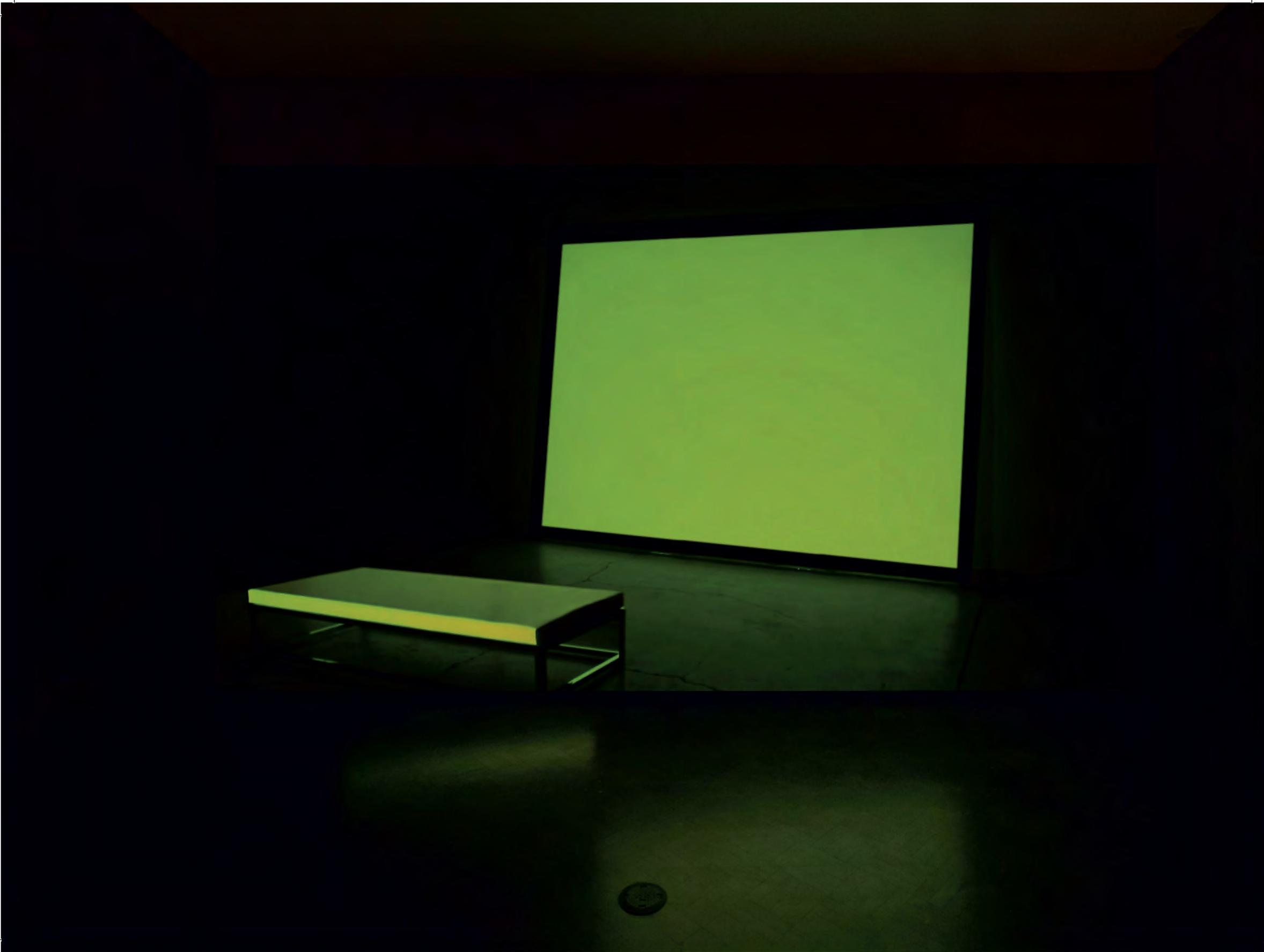
right:

**twenty poems of love and one desperate song  
(re)defined**

Archer Gallery at Clark College, Vancouver,  
Washington

book of archival prints

curated by Blake Shell as part of the series of  
exhibitions PERIMETER: WE LIVE HERE NOW  
organized by Terri Hopkins, The Art Gym



## an opera for one 2004–2012

*An opera for one* evolved out of a desire to create a work that combined light-music synthesis and spiritual, ecstatic experience with Pablo Neruda's erotically charged love poems. Its setting is the projected image of an empty space, which contains a white screen and a singular white viewing bench. The camera's point of view is askew and the perspective is forced. Within the frame, projected light bathes both the bench and the screen in colors that correspond to the applied color-code in time with the rhythm of the music. In essence, the opera is a projection of a projection of a projection, three times removed from its source.

left:

### an opera for one

Helzer Gallery, Portland Community  
College–Rock Creek, Portland, Oregon  
video and sound installation, HD video  
running time 01:28:24:20  
2009  
curated by tilt export  
dimensions variable

page 54:

### an opera for one

combined stills from the video and  
sound installation  
2004–12

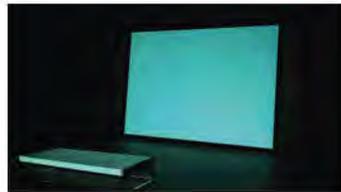
page 55:

### an opera for one, an opera for scriabin

installation at the Whitebox at University of  
Oregon, Portland, Oregon  
video and sound installation, HD video  
2012  
dimensions variable

In 2004, I hired the young Canadian mezzo-soprano Deanna Pauletto to sing Neruda's book of poetry *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* a cappella. The piece was recorded in a cement-encased stairwell, sixteen stories high, with only one take and no rehearsal. She was given a color-coded score of the poetry based on my interpretation of the relation between color and its emotional vibration. The composer Alexander Scriabin's color codex heavily influenced my research, but equally significant was Saint Teresa of Avila's text *The Interior Castle*. In 2008 I hired the musician David Rosman to map Scriabin's color code to the tonalities of Deanna Pauletto's voice. After recording the resulting color with the sound, I decided that Scriabin's synesthetic system was not appropriate for Neruda's text. Returning to the original color-coded score as my source, I reassigned color by means of my own emotional, notional, and symbolic evaluation of Deanna Pauletto's vocal interpretation of Neruda's poetry.

—Kartz Ucci







## an opera for one, an opera for scriabin 2012

The libretto incorporates two music-color interpretations (correspondences) of *an opera for one* (2009), my 88-minute-long video composite and sound production based on Pablo Neruda's book of poetry *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*. The bookwork extends beyond the opera's original video interpretation to include a mapping of Scriabin's synesthetic system based on the tonalities of Deanna Pauletto's voice and including the original Spanish text and its English translation. The text is mapped to its color correspondence via each visual interpretation of the opera.

The bookwork begins with *an opera for one* at one end of the book; when you flip the book over, *an opera for scriabin* begins at the other end. Each opera's libretto ends in the middle.

—Kartz Ucci





# like smoke and holy water 2010

*Like smoke and holy water* is a site-specific response to the architectural grandeur of Linfield Gallery, articulating and reflecting the natural light that fills the space through the singular use of highly reflective mirrored surfaces.

—Kartz Ucci



*opposite page and left:*

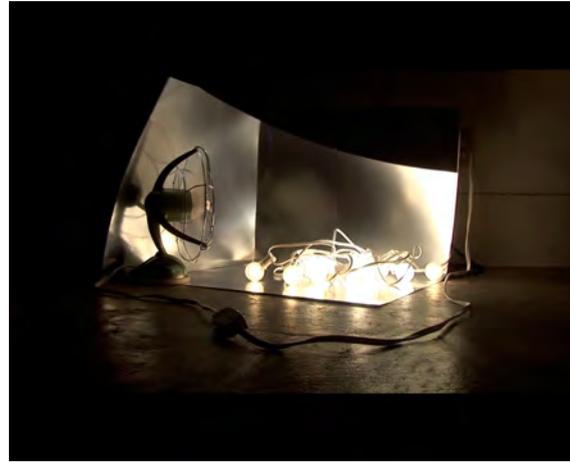
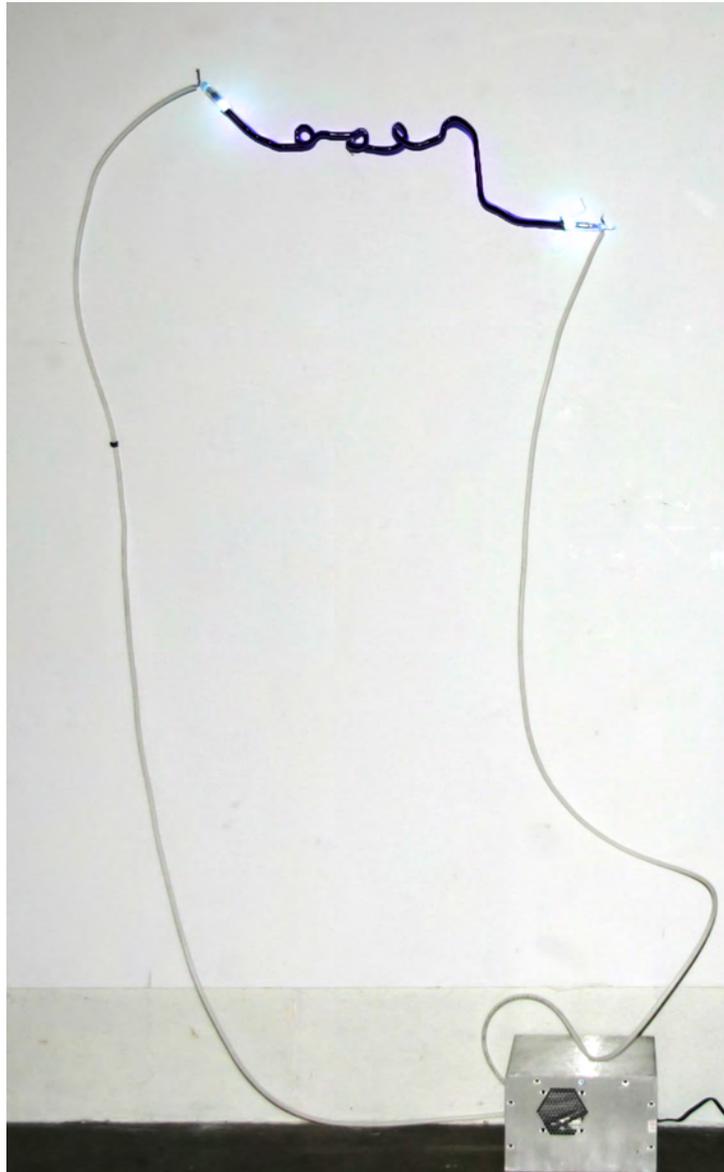
**like smoke and holy water**  
Linfield Gallery at Linfield College, McMinnville, Oregon  
chrome vinyl text installation  
2010  
curated by Cris Moss  
dimensions variable, text height 5 feet

*below:*

exterior/interior view of *like smoke and holy water*



**loser** 2008–2010



*above:*

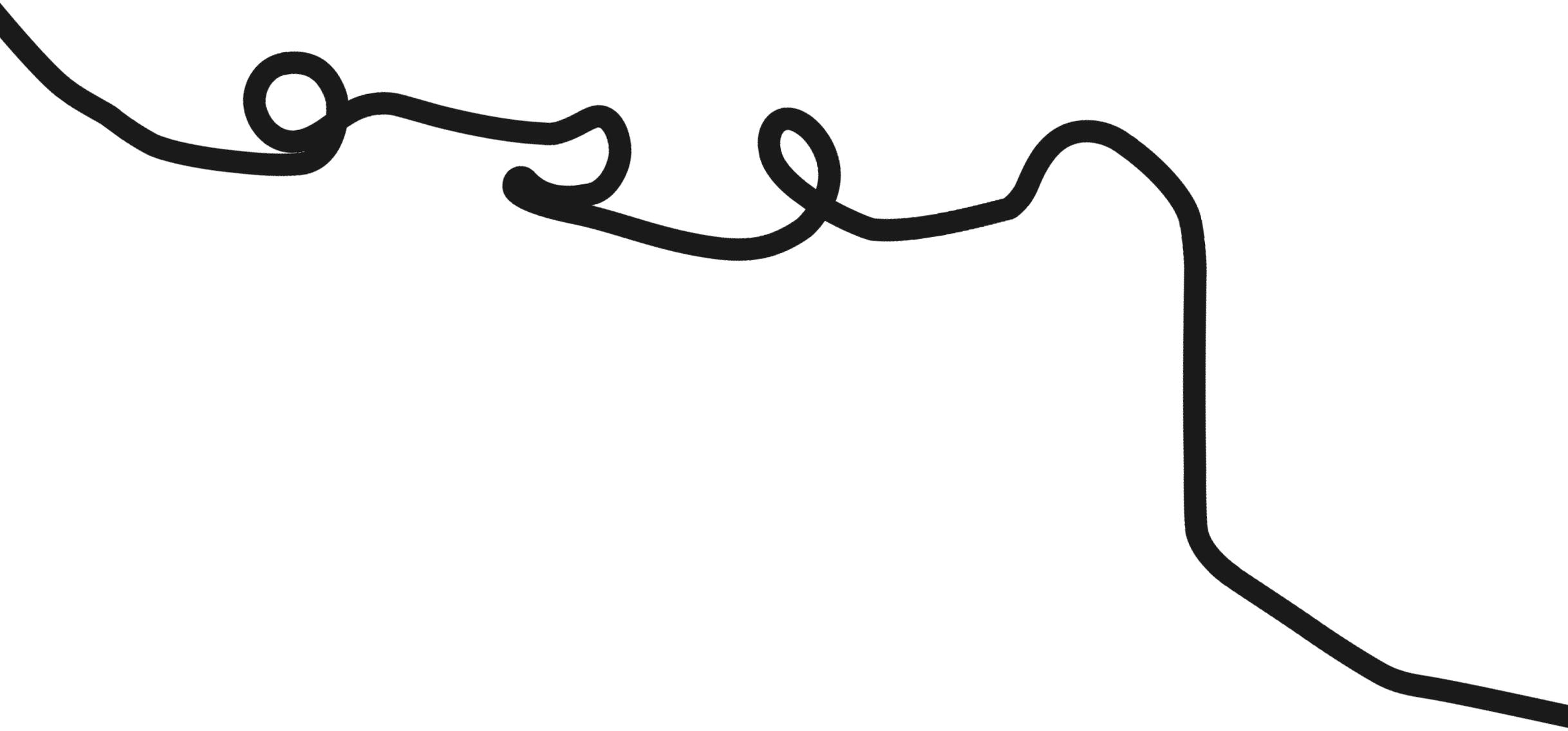
**loser**  
black light neon  
2009  
6 x 12 inches

*left:*

**loser**  
diptych, black light neon, and backlit photo  
2009  
30 x 60 inches

*opposite page:*

**loser**  
detail, vector work created from original  
photograph by Kartz Ucci



## 256 shades of grey 2013

*256 shades of grey* was a temporary sound and light piece projected into/onto the desert so that it reads only as shades of grey in the distance. The audio is an instrumental conversion of the 1987 Grateful Dead song “A Touch of Grey” to MIDI sound files (archaic computer sound files) for five instruments: three guitars, bass, and drum.

—Abby Donovan

I have chosen this Grateful Dead song very specifically for the line ... I/WE WILL SURVIVE ... for its relationship to my current path in life—for its historic attachment to my life in Eugene. The final work will be a projection with just loud instrumental sound/a bookwork with the audio (presenting the music and lyrics) and hopefully an audience that sings the words.

—Kartz Ucci

*right:*

**256 shades of grey**

detail of color selections from original files by  
Kartz Ucci

*pages 225–226:*

**256 shades of grey**

High Desert Test Sites, Joshua Tree, California  
Kartz Ucci with Abby Donovan and Tom  
Hughes  
sound and light piece  
2013  
photography by Brooks Dierdorff and  
Jesse Sugarmann









2015

installation of kartz ucci—an opera for one

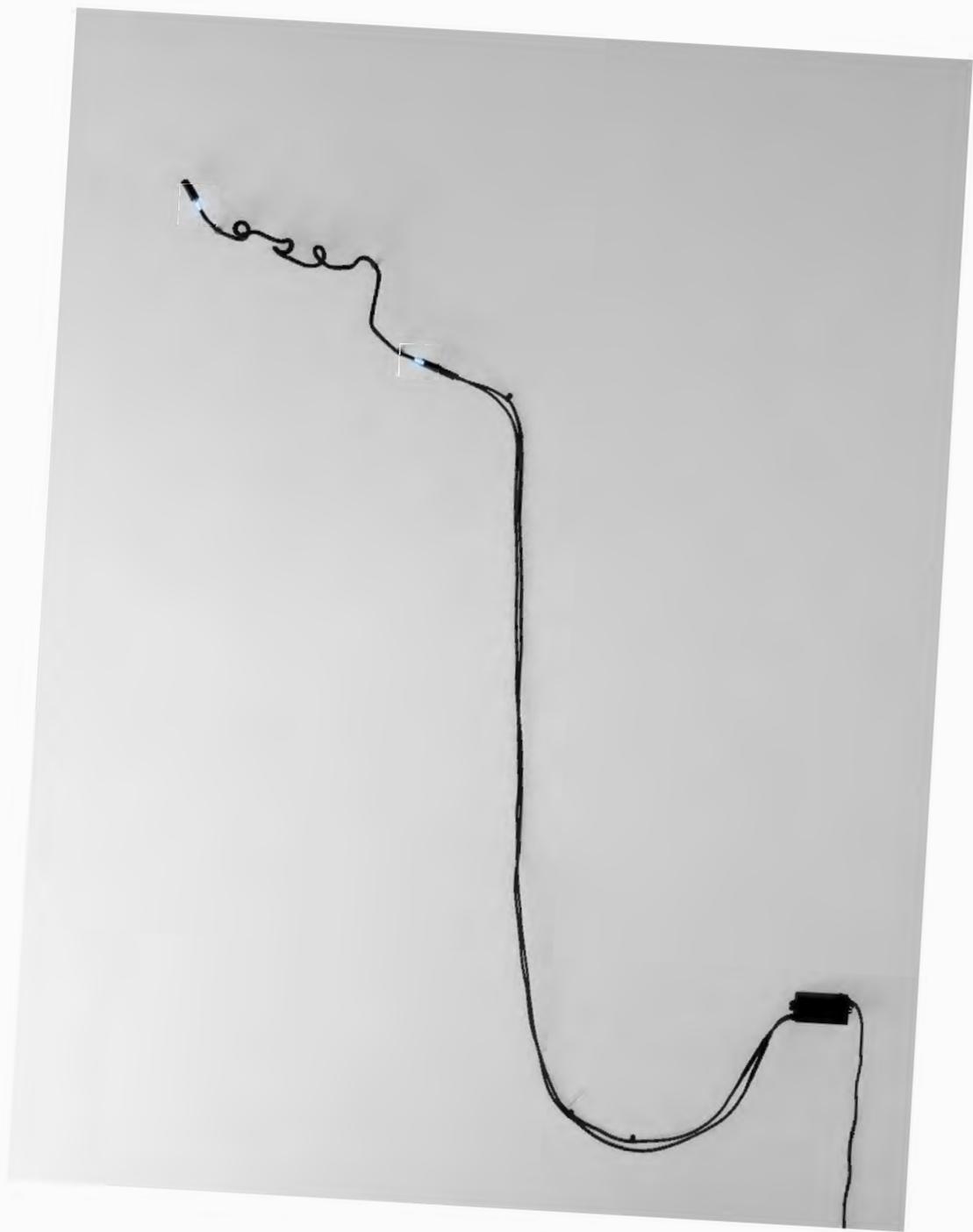
The Art Gym

photography by Kathleen Murney









FURTHER  
THAN  
EVERYTHING









## About the Artist

Kartz Ucci received her MFA in visual art in 1995 from York University in Toronto, Canada. She joined the faculty at the University of Oregon in 2004 and received tenure there in 2011. Her prior teaching engagements included York University, McMaster University, and Ryerson University in Canada.

Ucci was an installation artist who worked in light, sound, video, performance, photography, and text. In working with contemporary notions of appropriation, she re-authored and recoded existing texts, musical pieces, and films. A common element in her work is the recursive relationship between the original and its recoded meaning. Relevant texts, ideological statements, and specific substrates or visual representations (imagined or real) expand the context and content of her subject matter, either physically and/or philosophically.

Ucci's work has been exhibited and screened nationally and internationally at venues in Montreal, Canada; Toronto, Canada; Jinan, China; Limassol, Cyprus; Bremen, Germany; Seoul, Korea; Porto, Portugal; Barcelona, Spain; Basel, Switzerland; Bangkok, Thailand; San Francisco, California, USA; Newark, Delaware, USA; and Portland, Oregon, USA.



# Biographies

## The Art Gym

Since 1980, The Art Gym has been recognized as a venue that exhibits some of the most significant and timely art of this region. The mission of the gallery is to increase public understanding of the contemporary art of the Pacific Northwest through exhibitions, artists' projects, publications, and public engagement.

The Art Gym is a non-collecting, non-commercial gallery that supports artists in creating ambitious, risk-taking projects at various stages in their careers. As an art space working within an academic venue, we are committed to providing artistic and intellectual freedom. The Art Gym's catalogues continue to be among the greatest records of the contemporary art history of the Pacific Northwest, contributing to the discourse on contemporary art and representing the region. We are dedicated to making knowledge accessible and connecting artists and community.

## Blake Shell

Blake Shell is the Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Director and Curator of The Art Gym and Belluschi Pavilion at Marylhurst University, providing the artistic direction and leadership of the organization. Shell is a contemporary art curator and artist with more than twelve years of experience in directing nonprofit and educational galleries. She received a BA in art from the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, and an MFA in photography from Savannah College of Art and Design. Her curatorial work has gained regional attention and press in the Pacific Northwest, as well as a national review on Artforum.com's Critic's Picks. Shell is currently a panelist for the Visual Chronicle of Portland, managed by the Regional Arts & Culture Council.

### **Prudence F. Roberts**

Prudence F. Roberts is an art historian and curator who teaches courses and directs the Helzer Art Gallery at Portland Community College's Rock Creek campus. She is a former curator of American art at the Portland Art Museum, where she also focused on the museum's historic and contemporary regional collections and on early American museology. She has written on and organized exhibitions of the work of such artists as Lucinda Parker, Bonnie Bronson, James Lavadour, Eric Stotik, and Carl Morris. She has written reviews for *Artweek*, *Selvedge*, and *Surface Design Journal*, and catalogue essays for Geraldine Ondrizek, Frank Boyden, Tom Cramer, and others.

Roberts was the curator of Disjecta's Portland2012 biennial. She is a member of Disjecta's board and the board of Crow's Shadow Institute of the Arts, and has served on panels for the Regional Arts & Culture Council and the Ford Family Foundation.

Roberts was born in Philadelphia and moved to Oregon in 1985. She received her BA from Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, NY; and her MALS degree from Reed College.

### **Abby Donovan**

Abby Donovan lives and works in Eugene, Oregon, and Newark, Delaware, where she is director of graduate studies and an associate professor in the Department of Art at the University of Delaware. She has had exhibitions and performances at a variety of venues, including Novella Gallery, New York, NY; Slingshot Festival 2014 for Experimental Music, Art, and Electronics, Athens, GA; Bowery Arts & Science, New York, NY; Galleria Artra, Milan, Italy; SPACE Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA; the National Centre for Contemporary Arts, St. Petersburg, Russia; the Stockholm Fringe Festival, Stockholm, Sweden; the ICA Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA; and the European Ceramic Work Centre, 's-Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands. Donovan received her MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art and her BA from Swarthmore College.

## Gallery Acknowledgements

This publication adds to The Art Gym's collection of catalogues of contemporary art of the Pacific Northwest and is available in print and online. This book and project were made possible in great part through the help and generosity of the Regional Arts & Culture Council and Work for Art, the Clackamas County Cultural Coalition and Oregon Cultural Trust, and the University of Oregon. This publication would not be possible without The Art Gym Art Production and Publication Fund donors, including the Harold & Arlene Schnitzer CARE Foundation; Erin Gardner; Linda Hutchins and John Montague; Sarah Miller Meigs; Stephanie Snyder, John and Anne Hauberg Curator and Director of the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College; and many more individuals who gave through our first Kickstarter campaign. Thank you to everyone for your support.

We would like to thank Abby Donovan and Prudence Roberts for their insightful essays on Kartz's work. Thank you to the family of Kartz Ucci for their support in this project and their recognition of the importance of documenting Kartz's practice.

The Art Gym and Marylhurst University would also like to deeply thank artist Tannaz Farsi for her guidance and work on the exhibition and catalogue. Without her efforts and the efforts of many other University of Oregon faculty and community members, we could not have been certain that the exhibition and publication were true to Kartz Ucci's vision.

In memory of Kartz Ucci—artist, educator, friend.



UCCI



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