

*Raw Shameless Miracles*  
Drew Robertson

*Documents submitted to the Faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of the Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art*

2016

Approved by:

Sabine Gruffat *chair*  
Elin O'Hara Slavick  
Hong-An Truong  
Cary Levine

©2016  
Drew Robertson  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



Drew Robertson

## **Raw Shameless Miracles Statement**

**Raw Shameless Miracles** investigates social dynamics by way of the language of comedy performance and the concept of the feedback loop. In a behavioral system a feedback loop as defined by Stuart Umpleby is “information about the results of a process which is used to change the process itself.” In stand-up comedy and other performance this is clear. As a comic presents their material they are given real time reactions, in the form of laughter, or conversely silence or groans. What this means about the feedback loop, and what is important to my work, is that the audience/ viewer, is an active and interactive participant. A relationship is made.

**Raw Shameless Miracles** includes a three channel video with sound, and a stage with live microphones and stools. In the installation, I the artist am equal to each member of the audience since I rely on the audience to complete the loop. Particularly a loop created with humor. The audience laughs and this makes the joke funny. The audience’s laughter is the art in this performance. It is a relational interplay in which both parties reciprocally sustain the experience.

Laughter is a complicated and coded expression. People laugh in many different situations and laughter can bridge an entire range of emotions. It can start as joy but lead to other responses, the awkward ones like feelings of insecurity, embarrassment, and discomfort. Either way laughter shows an audience responding with their bodies.

In **Raw Shameless Miracles**, three videos feature footage from 1-hour comedy specials. We see Eddie Murphy’s “**Raw**,” Sarah Silverman’s “We Are **Miracles**,” and Louie CK’s “**Shameless**.” In each, the appropriated footage is reoriented to a portrait format, and each comedians’ jokes have been methodically removed. Removing the jokes of Murphy, Silverman, and CK gives space for the viewer to act as stand-in. This allows the viewer to feel as if the recorded audience is laughing at, and applauding them. The interplay is rhythmic. The call and response between comic and viewer is based in sound. The performer is no longer telling jokes. It becomes clear that each comic on screen has a rigorous practice that employs posturing, movement, breathing, voice, and most importantly, timing. The beat. On screen the recorded audience adds an audible element of chance to the score. They respond with laughter, but it is up to them, their whim, and determines whether this laughter

is uproarious, or small, how long, how intense. This creates a social and dynamic relationship between everyone involved. This responsive collaboration manifests as a feedback loop, that charges and inspires the feeling of the gallery.

Adjacent to the three videos is a stage upon which each viewer must step when entering the gallery. On the stage are six microphones, six microphone stands, and six stools. As one walks on the stage they can hear the audio from the adjacent video pieces mixing with their own movements. The live microphones' volumes are turned up just to the brink of feeding back. This amplifies the sounds of the viewers moving around the stage: whispers; words; jokes; coughs; nervous laughter; conversations: things that the audience brings into the room. The viewer is also a live performer. There is potential for more. One may choose to speak or yell or joke into the microphones. They can read from pre-made jokes, come up with their own, tell their favorites, or just say anything they like. All the while the audio from the three channel video is answering their actions.

The orchestral sound environment, partially random situation, and the unexpected collaborative encounters, coupled with the sculptural elements and videos create the sonic and experiential feedback loop that make up **Raw Shameless Miracles**. It creates laughter born from humor but also from the awkward feelings of being put on stage. Either way the viewer feels something and this completes the loop.

***Drew Robertson***

...

Thesis Defense Presentation 2016

**Drew  
Robertson**  
keepingitrealandwhatnot.com

LIVE 4 YOUR  
DREAMS

autograph for you: **DREW ROBERTSON**

twitter: @drewrobertson      insta: @drewberto


A portrait of Drew Robertson, a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a black cap and a black t-shirt, against a light blue background.

**Drew  
Robertson**  
keepingitrealandwhatnot.com

W I O U  
T H E R E ' D B E  
N O M E

autograph for you: **DREW ROBERTSON**

twitter: @drewrobertson      insta: @drewberto

A portrait of Drew Robertson, a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a black cap and a black t-shirt, against a light blue background.

My art abstracts humor.

I research humor theories to make work that permeates the viewer through both mind and body.

Using video, sound, performance or installation, I use the vernacular of comedy: joke structure, timing, repetition, the pause, and gesture.

In my work, laughter acts as a Trojan Horse granting me access to viewers' emotions and thoughts.

## Social Interaction as a Feedback System And the Play on Feedback as a Term

- Auditory Feedback (Larsen Effect)  
    🔊))
- Behavioral Feedback Loop

## Timing in Comedic Performance

- Rigorously Rehearsed
- Rhythm through Speech, Breathing, Gesture, and the Pause – the Beat
- Repetition as a rhythmic tool for abstraction





*Portable Comedy Club, 2015*

Stage, stool, microphone and stand, PA system,  
and fabrick backdrop.





still from *Covers*, 2015  
Digital Video



*Covers*, 2015  
Digital Video  
Installation View







still from *Same Joke, Different Shirts* 2016  
Digital Video







still from *Same Joke, Different Folks*, 2016  
Digital Video



Same Joke, Different Folks, 2016  
Digital Video Installation View



Same Joke, Different Folks, 2016  
Digital Video Installation View







*John Baldessari*  
*I Am Making Art*, 1971

Video

via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOF3qhM6vIA>





still from *Same Joke, Different Time*, 2016  
Digital Video









*Same Joke, Different Shirts*, 2016  
Installation view detail

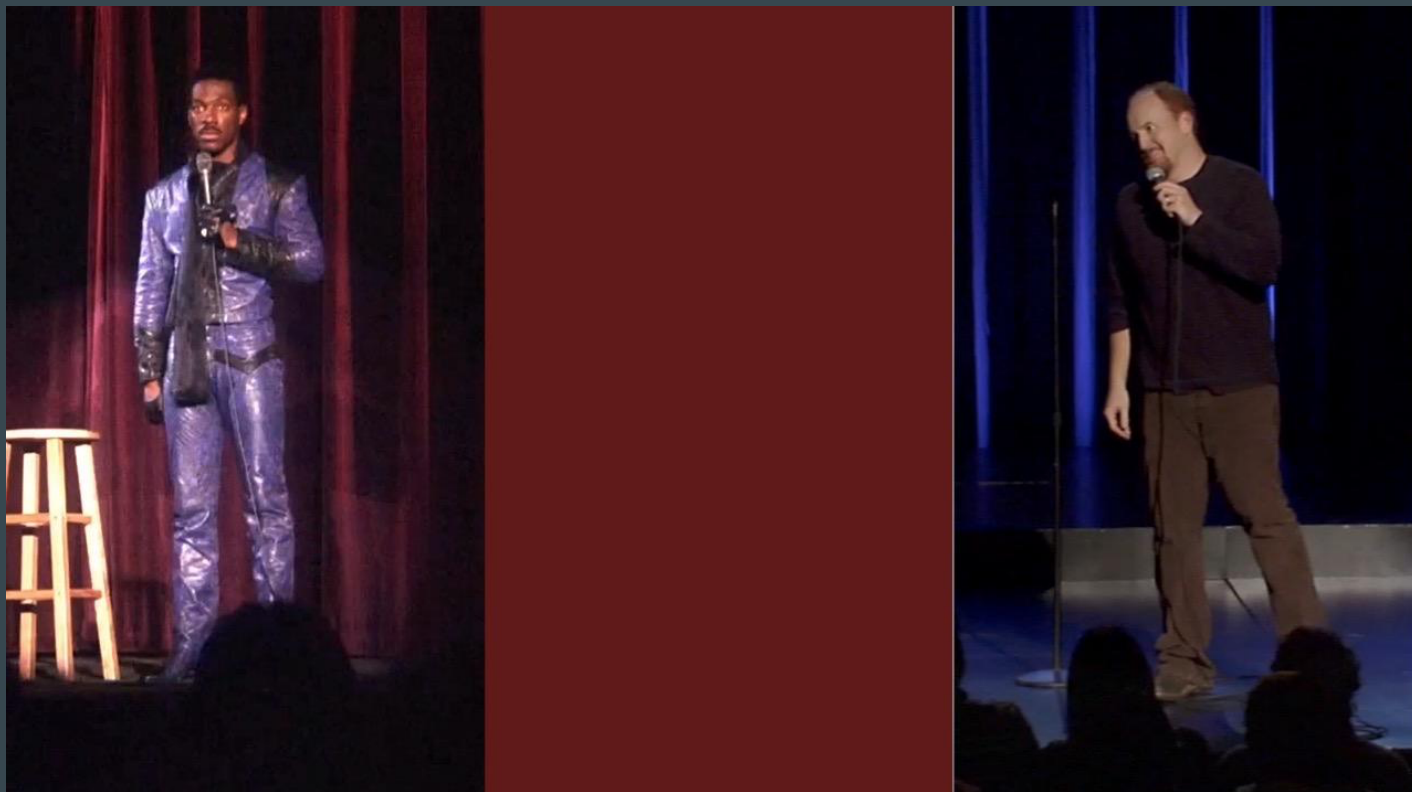


Drew Robertson  
American, born 1980  
*Same Joke, Different Time*  
looped video  
Lent by the artist, 2016

*Same Joke, Different Time*, 2016  
Installation view detail



*Same Joke, Series, 2016*  
Installation view



Still from *Raw Shameless Miracles(Erased Comics)*, 2016  
Three Channel Video



Robert Rauschenberg  
*Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953  
Image via SFMoMA  
<https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/98.298>





Still from *Raw Shameless Miracles(Erased Comics)*, 2016  
Three Channel Video





*Raw Shameless Miracles (Erased Comics)*, 2016  
Installation view



*Raw Shameless Miracles (Erased Comics)*, 2016  
Installation view



*Raw Shameless Miracles (Erased Comics)*, 2016  
Installation view





*Raw Shameless Miracles (For Six or More Performers)*, 2016  
Installation view

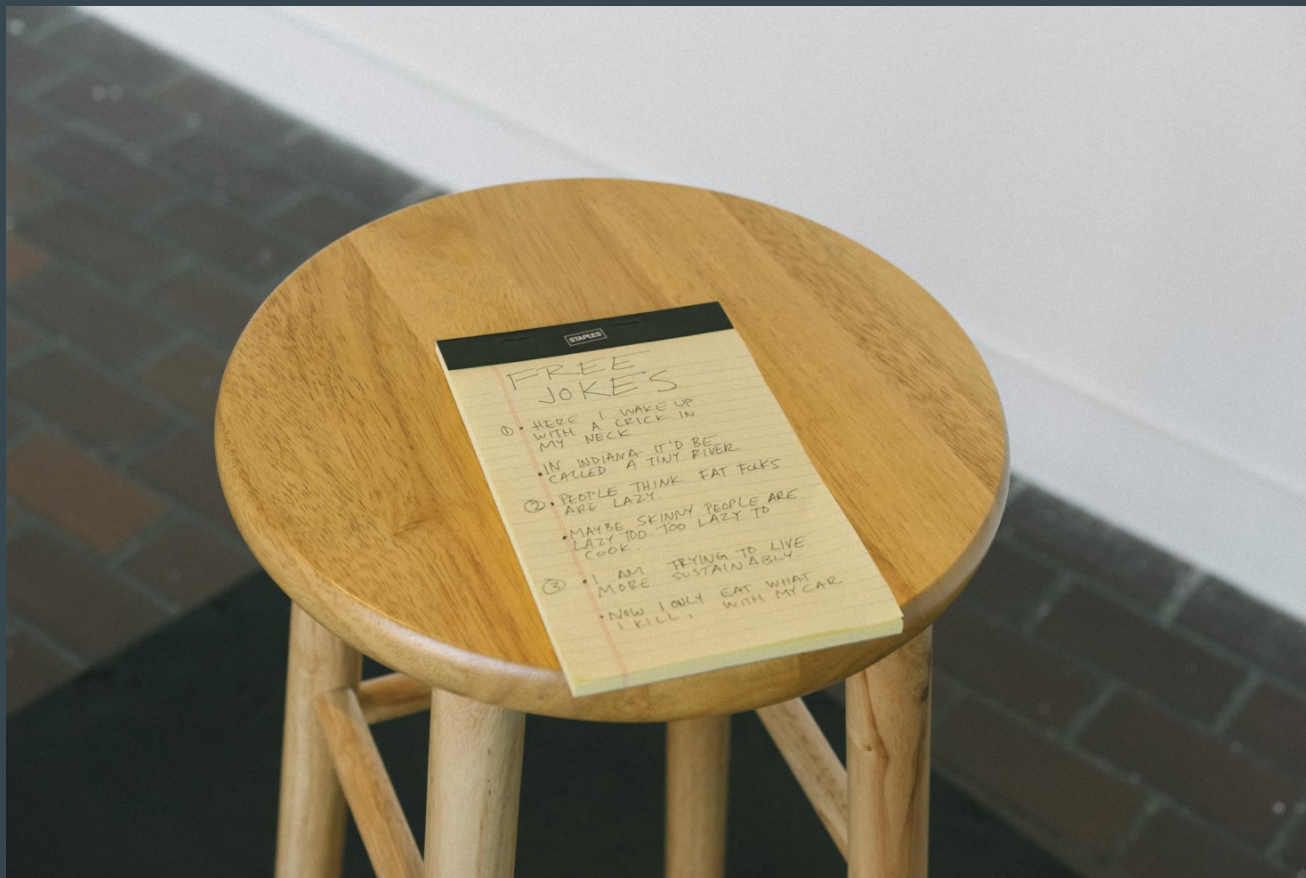


*Raw Shameless Miracles (For Six or More Performers)*, 2016  
Installation view



*Raw Shameless Miracles (For Six or More Performers), 2016*  
Installation view





*Raw Shameless Miracles (For Six or More Performers), 2016*  
Installation view



*Raw Shameless Miracles (For Six or More Performers), 2016*  
Installation view





*Raw Shameless Miracles (For Six or More Performers)*, 2016  
Installation view

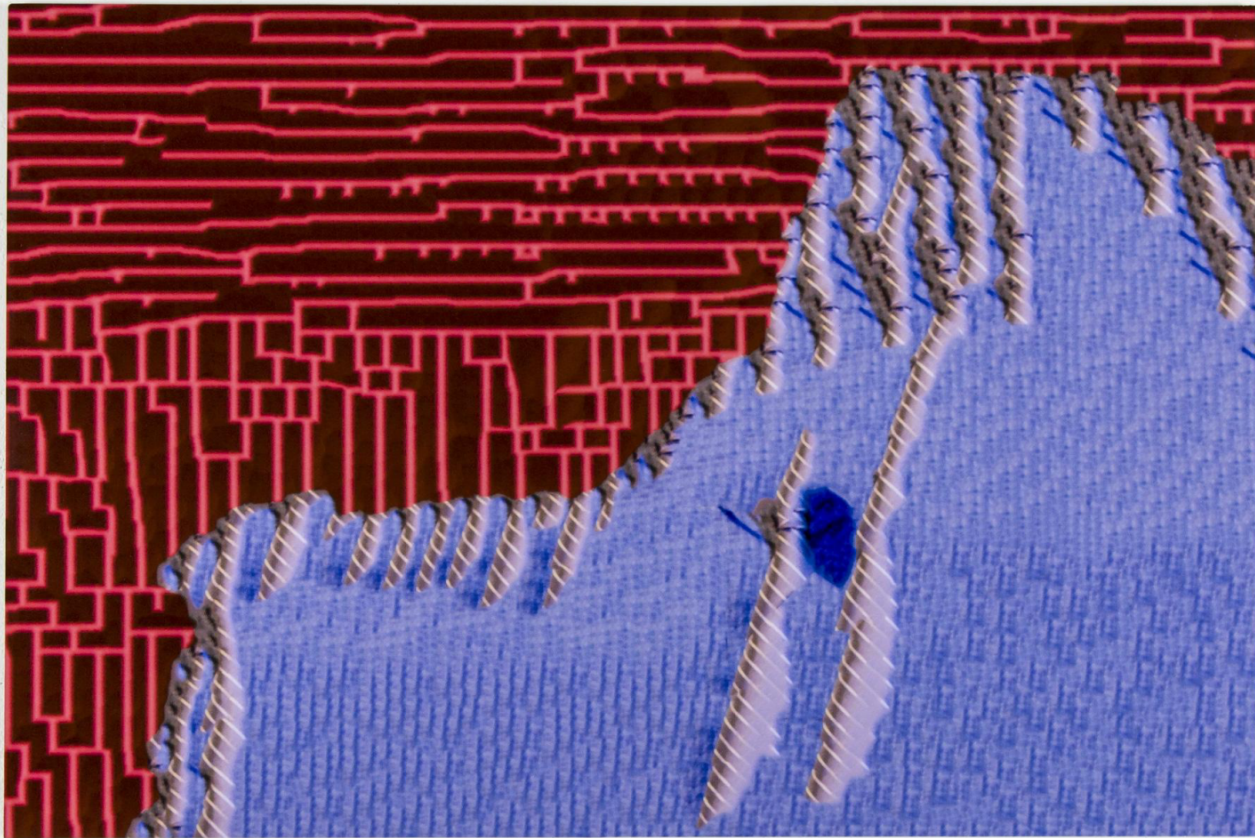


*Raw Shameless Miracles (For Six or More Performers)*, 2016  
Installation view

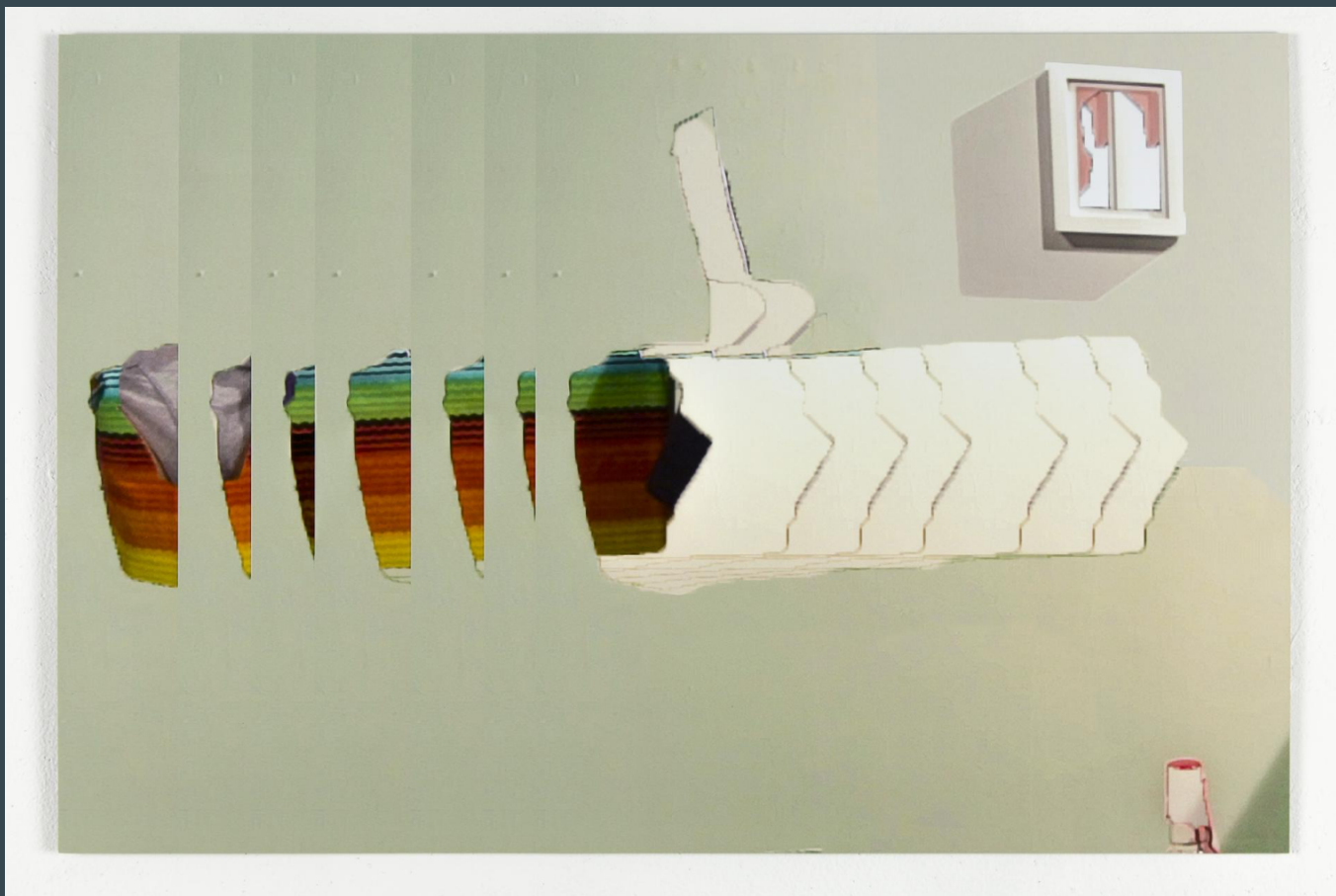




*Raw Shameless Miracles (For Six or More Performers)*, 2016  
Installation view

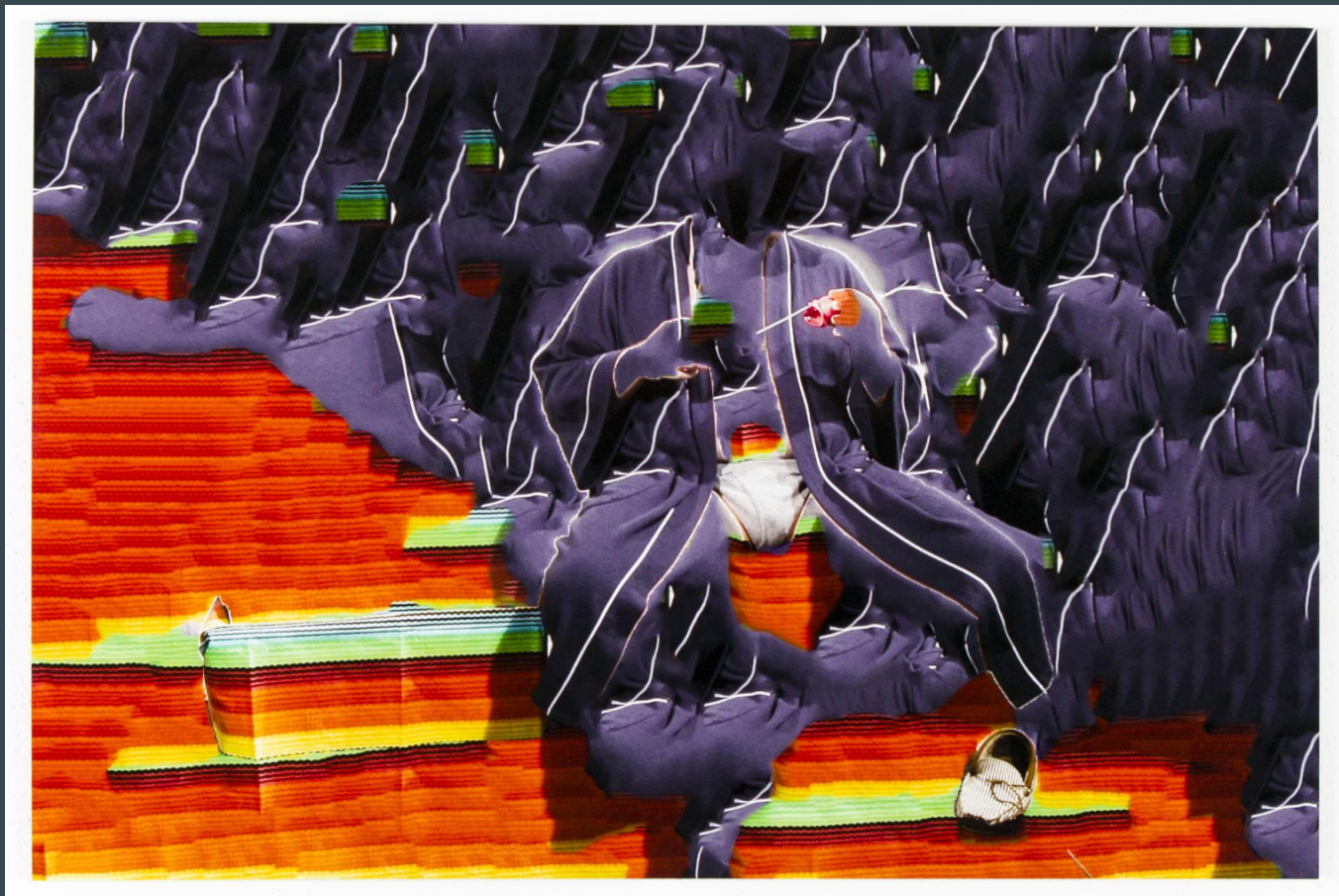


*Killing Stills 1, 2015*  
Digitally composited image, laser print 24" x 36"



*Killing Stills 2, 2015*  
Digitally composited image, laser print 24" x 36"





*Killing Stills 3, 2015*  
Digitally composited image, laser print 24" x 36"





Tummy Triptych, 2016  
Digital photograph 24" x 54"



*Untitled (Tummy Series)*, 2016  
Digital Photography



*Untitled (Tummy Series), 2016*  
Digital Photography



Tummy Triptych, 2016  
Installation View Detail





*Untitled (Tummy)*, 2016  
Installation View Detail



*Tummy Series*, 2016  
Installation View

# Thanks You!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Sabine for always having a good sense of humor, and at the same time not sugar coating anything. I value her candor. I also value her masterful technical advice whenever I have had editing or compositing issues.

Elin for being so encouraging. She is always in my corner, and at times when I doubted myself she brought a wonderful clarity and positive inspiration.

Hong-An for pushing me to formulate my ideas fully, and not leave details unaccounted for. I appreciate her patience and empathy. She definitely helped me keep things in perspective on more than one occasion where I needed reassurance.

Cary is honest and doesn't mince words. It is not harsh, rather it's concise and that's exactly what I need sometimes. We only had a couple of studio visits but both were great and gave me the courage to stick with using comedy as a lens to see larger issues in world.