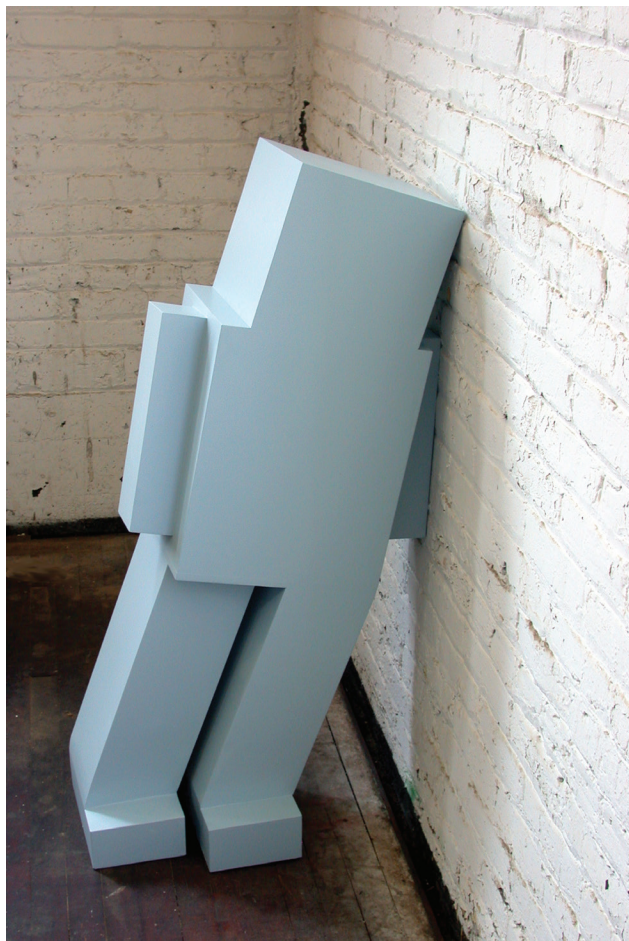


DONALD MORGAN

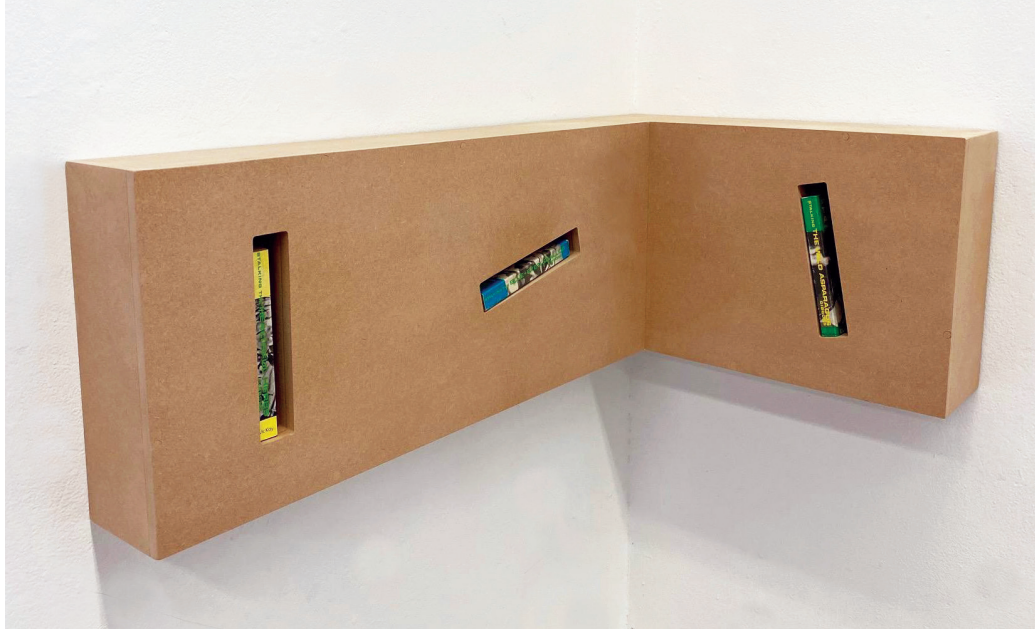




Drunk Robot, 2004
Collaboration with Scott Reeder
MDF, enamel
45 x 15 x 12 in

Previous page

Top Ten Icelandic Sci Fi Anthologies, 2018
MDF, enamel
30 x 35 x 35 in



Euell Gibbons Memorial Library, 2019
MDF, found books
12 x 36 x 19 in



Birth Book Chair, 2019
MDF, casters, found book, plexiglass
35 x 34 x 35 in



Black Flag, 2013
Acrylic laminate, wood
47 x 20 x 7 in
Photo: Mike Bray

MAINTAINING

by Jon Raymond

Dying is easy, as they say in show business, but comedy is hard. It's a sentiment that bears out in the visual arts, too, where many artists traffic in the lyrical, the critical, the operatic, and all manner of poesy with an eye on mortality, but only a select few could be considered very funny. Picabia and Magritte were kind of funny artists of their Dada/Surrealist era. Jim Nutt was funny, in that zany 60s way, and William Wegman in that elliptical 70s conceptualist way. Mark Tansey and Jeff Wall allowed into their 80s postmodernism what Wall has called, after Mikhail Bakhtin, "suppressed laughter," and Mike Kelly and Paul McCarthy made actual laugh-out-loud pieces in the abject 90s.

Donald Morgan is a member of the greater funny school. He's like the wry, brainy teenager sitting in the back of the class, murmuring comments under his breath that are precise and understated and come at you sideways. One example, taken almost at random, is an older piece called "Drunk Robot" made in collaboration with Scott Reeder. It is from a batch of digital-looking, Atari-like sculptural renderings of a figure posed in different drunken postures. In one, the drunken robot is leaning against a wall; in another, he/she is on his/her knees. There's also a "stoned" variation staring at a wall. In the pieces' minimalist reduction of form, and their active engagement with contemporary culture, they partake in classically modernist strategies of making, but Morgan's inebriation narrative puts the work on a woozy slant. You get the joke quickly enough, but if you linger you also get a lesson in sculptural theory. You start seeing Judd's bricks, and a trope on Minimalist "theatricality." You start thinking about two and three dimensional space in the screen era, and the body in physical space. The joke opens the door to a wide and subtle rearrangement of perception, as a good joke should.

Another piece, "Black Flag," performs a different kind of comedy. The piece is a simple black flag made out of laminated plywood, held upright on a short wooden flagpole by a notched black mask atilt on the floor. The mask has two round eye holes that bring to mind Guston's klansman hoods, but the blackness makes this an executioner's hood, though it also looks like a grocery bag, or a Pac Man ghost. Some clever person has pointed out an Iwo Jima association permeating the whole arrangement, the upraised flag, the "figure" at the base, but the association is so slim it barely holds. What is going on here? This isn't comedy in the stand-up sense, with hard laughs following discrete punchlines, or even chuckles during rambling anecdotes. This is more like funny queer, or a non sequitur in a dream. The

knowledge that Tim O'Brien's Vietnam classic *The Things They Carried* inspired the piece, or that it stands in relation to other tidy, bullet-riddled, black, plywood pieces, helps only partly by way of clarification.

"Drunk Robot" and "Black Flag," like many of Morgan's pieces, have a cartoonish quality, and, as those who've done drugs understand, cartoons carry natural psychedelic associations. The anti-gravity bounce, the weird, scary chiaroscuro, the floating, dimensional layering of the backgrounds, the rim-lighting, the molded, plasticine surfaces, cartoons mimic the zone of altered consciousness, or vice versa. "Hard Edged Hallucination" makes this connection explicit, featuring a pile of cow shit and psilocybin mushrooms cast in stainless steel set on a canary yellow cube in front of a canary yellow and gray backdrop of modular, silkscreened panels that allude to broken windowpanes. One pane features a printed spiderweb, and crossing another two panes is a black cat, which together summon the idea of scariness, albeit on a thin, Fred Meyer Halloween section level of intensity. As Morgan is a literary fellow, Ahab's famous line from Moby Dick might be apropos: "All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks." Underneath Morgan's flimsy Halloween masks—as under reality itself—is something spooky, the piece seems to imply, but what that is, we don't know.

It seems like there might be an angry teenage Ahab in Morgan (i.e. "Black Flag"). If that's so, he long ago came to reside inside a full-grown, melancholy adult, and whatever crass or cutting or dark-hearted jokes stand at the inception of his ideas, they're quickly passed on to this craftsman who mills them into products of great sturdiness and precision. Something happens to the ideas as they undergo this patient, concerted labor. They don't get funnier, exactly, but much as the original grammar of a sentence is buried in revision, the original idea is coated over and over in the extended meditation that is the execution of a piece of art. The end result, for Morgan, is often a piece that's at once gnostic, immaculately-made, and distantly related to the work of Richard Artschwager, one of Morgan's favorite artists, whose practice of "Purism" was a form of cubism without detail—a refinement of often comical ideas into pure, expertly-made objects that resembled furniture.

This process might be a means of capturing some of the "suppressed laughter" Wall was talking about. "Things can be laughed about," Wall said, "but not openly. The fact that the laughter is not open gives it a sinister, neurotic, bitter, and ironic quality. It's a kind of mannerist laughter that is similar to Jewish humor, *Schadenfreude*, and gallows humor."¹ Morgan's art



Hard Edge Hallucination, 2013
Enamel and silkscreen on acrylic laminate, wood, stainless steel
Dimensions variable
Photo: Evan La Londe

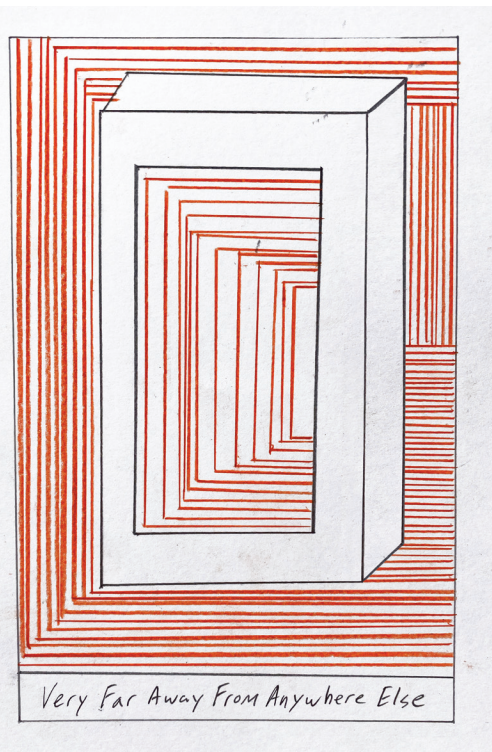


Hard Edge Hallucination (detail), 2013
Stainless steel
5 x 8 x 11 in
Photo: Evan La Londe

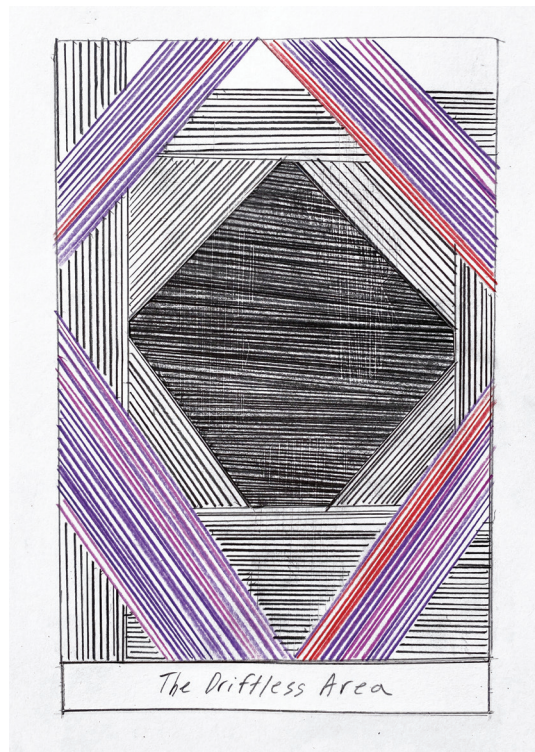
has some of all of that, but something else, too. The closed-mouth laughter ringing from his works is more like what stoned kids call "maintaining," i.e. keeping it together at the dinner table while the corkscrews and wind shears of a trip fly around inside the skull. Insanity might be unfurling before one's eyes, but one's face doesn't register it. In this way, Morgan's art maintains, sending its silent, wry, horrified laughter into the void.

Jon Raymond is the author of novels Rain Dragon, The Half-Life, Freebird, and the forthcoming The Empty Chair, and the short-story collection Livability. A selection of his art writing was published as The Community.

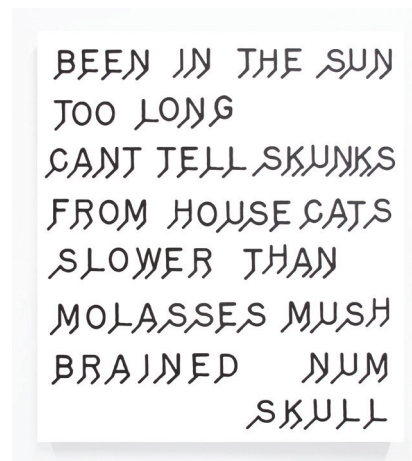
¹ Chevier, Jean-Francois, "The Interiorized Academy: An Interview with Jeff Wall," *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews*, (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996), pg.109.



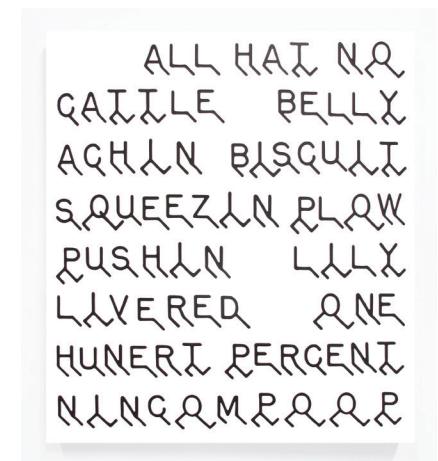
Very Far Away From Anywhere Else – Ursula K. Le Guin, 2020
Graphite, colored pencil on paper
11 x 8½ in



The Driftless Area – Tom Drury, 2020
Graphite, colored pencil on paper
11 x 8½ in



Dragging Curse, 2016
Enamel on acrylic laminate
43 x 38 in
Photo: Mike Bray



Walking Curse, 2016
Enamel on acrylic laminate
43 x 38 in
Photo: Mike Bray

DONALD MORGAN

b. 1969. Lives and works in Eugene, Oregon

2020 Hallie Ford Fellow

Donald Morgan's work is deceptively complex. Impeccably built and finished sculptures pose a compendium of questions and narratives in conversation with texts. The works touch on broad-brush humor and high-brow postmodernism. Morgan's work has been shown widely including venues such as High Desert Test Sites in Joshua Tree, California, the Green Gallery, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; the Art Gym at Marylhurst University, Portland, Oregon; and Portland2016 Biennial of Contemporary Art at Disjecta Contemporary Art Center, curated by Michelle Grabner. Morgan received his Master of Fine Arts from Art Center College of Design in 2001. He was an early member of Ditch Projects, an artist-run exhibition space in Springfield, Oregon.

Hallie Brown was born in 1905, outside of Tulsa, in Indian Territory that would become the state of Oklahoma. She supported herself as she earned a bachelor's degree at East Central University and taught in Oklahoma before her parents moved their family to rural Oregon. In 1935 Hallie married Kenneth W. Ford and together they established Roseburg Lumber Company in the midst of the Great Depression.

Hallie Ford was drawn to art all her life, specifically the accessibility of artmaking. She took classes with the painter Carl Hall at Willamette University in Salem, and painting became a central part of her life. Her philanthropy established and supported key Oregon visual art museums and universities.

After Hallie's death in 2007, The Ford Family Foundation's Board of Directors honored our co-founder by establishing a Visual Arts Program. The first element of this program was the Hallie Ford Fellowships in the Visual Arts, awarded since 2010. Through these unrestricted fellowships, we seek to make significant awards to visual artists who have worked to establish their voice and craft.

Another of our goals is to help support the ecology that builds connections and capacity in the visual arts community of our state. As the Fellows become the focus of exhibitions throughout the world, they bring more attention and support to their Oregon peers. We are certain that Hallie Ford would be pleased to see how both individual artists and the visual arts community in Oregon have flourished since the establishment of this program in her honor.

We could not be more excited each year to bring new Hallie Ford Fellows into this family, and to share their work with you.

Anne C. Kubisch
President, The Ford Family Foundation

The Hallie Ford Fellowships are the flagship element of The Ford Family Foundation Visual Arts Program. The Foundation commits to an ongoing relationship with our Fellows through exhibition support, convenings, and professional development opportunities. In addition, the Visual Arts Program offers grants to visual artists for unanticipated career opportunities; supports artists-in-residence programs in Oregon and nationally; brings curators and arts writers from outside the region to Oregon for studio visits and community dialogue; commissions arts writing and publication; supports exhibitions, catalogues and other forms of documentation for Oregon artists; and awards grants to enhance exhibition spaces.

The Foundation is pleased to partner with the Oregon Arts Commission, University of Oregon, Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA), Portland State University, Reed College, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA), Creative Capital, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, United States Artists, and the artists and visual arts organizations of our state.

The Ford Family Foundation was established in 1957 by Kenneth W. and Hallie E. Ford. Its mission is "successful citizens and vital rural communities" in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. The Foundation is located in Roseburg, Oregon, with a Scholarship office in Eugene. For more information about the Foundation and its Visual Arts Program, visit www.tfff.org.



VISUAL ARTS PROGRAM

© 2020

Published by The Ford Family Foundation,
Roseburg, OR

All rights reserved. This book may not
be reproduced, in whole or in part, in any
form without written permission from
the publisher.

Essay © 2020 by Jon Raymond

Designed by Martha Lewis

Photographed as credited

Edited by Abby McGehee

Printed and finished in Portland, OR,
by Brown Printing

All works: Courtesy the artist and
Fourteen30 Contemporary, Portland, OR