



Lisa Dillin: Sorry we missed you
7 May – 28 August 2021
Exhibition Catalogue





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Exhibition Statement

Since March of 2020 the physical and emotional space between each of us has widened like a deep chasm along an active fault line. Many of us are now largely alone in an echo chamber with ourselves: ungrounded and isolated. Floating. We are working from home without contact with our colleagues, our children are attending school online removed from daily interaction with their classmates, and we have severely limited if not eliminated the social gatherings with friends and family that we've enjoyed throughout our lives. We've tried to connect online, but became tired of virtual interaction. Some of us have found ourselves waving to parents and grandparents through panes of glass, pining to touch our loved ones. And despite this careful distancing, we have lost so many of our mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters. Our isolation is a necessity in order to protect one another – but, it's left a lasting impression on us. Some of us have tried to make the best of the alone time: we sipped quarantinis, attended virtual dance parties and learned to make sourdough bread or planted "victory gardens" in an attempt to find a silver lining.

As the last year passed by, small and midsize businesses closed, many permanently. "For Lease" signs populated our shop windows. Many industries such as travel and hospitality vanished, constricting cultural exchange and all but extinguishing the potential for adventure. We stayed indoors trying to find ways to occupy our time. The dream of abundant employment opportunities and the promise of engaging in a vibrant community was stolen from us – hopefully temporarily – though some of the changes we have seen will endure. Once buzzing city centers - many of which were already underutilized and in decline - have gone silent. City buildings and suburban retail centers that had long ago fallen into disrepair eerily await our return, while new sites join the process of

decline as constant investment is required to preserve our structures. Some of these sites have begun to show movement on the scale between the built environment and the natural world as nature begins to lay claim to them.

As we travel to these old familiar places, ducking our heads into doorways that have not been used in some time, we find that vestiges of what was abound. We have left traces of ourselves in every nook and cranny of our towns and cities. These human remnants are not dissimilar to messages in a bottle: they are clues to what came before, a voice waiting to be discovered if the recipient is open to receiving. Markings left by those who stood in the space you are standing in now are mysteries waiting to be solved. Who was here? What were they like? Where are they now? Time is all that separates us from one another in such spaces of investigation. When lost in thought in an empty reverberating room, we daydream nostalgically of lively vibrant gatherings full of smiling faces – they are so close yet so far away from us now.

Sorry we missed you is an attempt to make tangible the emotional quality of the sustained isolation and economic decline that characterizes this time. Sorry we missed you extends an open hand to the viewer and whispers “I understand how you feel, I’m feeling that way too. I miss you. I miss people. I miss people like you. I’m worried about our futures just as you are. I am right alongside you, feeling the vacancy of this moment and waiting for the day when we are together again - rebuilding.”

-Lisa Dillin

An Archive of the Forgotten

By Danielle O'Steen, Ph.D.

At first glance, Lisa Dillin's exhibition *Sorry we missed you* appears to be filled with the haunted remains of retail's past: empty shelves, pedestals, and display objects, accompanied by the sounds of dripping water, buzzing neon lights, and chirping insects. The items are stacked and stained, empty and forgotten, as they occupy the quiet, hallowed space of a repurposed church. It is as if humans have fled the scene, their presence still evident in elements such as a central, tiled fountain that is no longer running. Upon second glance, however, one notices the absurdist nature of these objects. The fountain is not connected to a water source. The pedestals are arranged thoughtfully, not haphazardly. This space is not forgotten but filled with constructed tableaux created by the artist.

Dillin has long been interested in the intersections between humans and their built environments, especially public settings that are often overlooked in everyday life. (She has a particular love of the architecture of malls, from the fountains and benches to the window displays.) In her sculptures, she carefully crafts objects that appear to be mass produced, referencing the corporate furniture and commercial design that occupy our worlds and mediate our interactions with one another. She is interested in the social distance created in everyday life, though the concept of "social distancing" takes on new meaning in 2021. In *Sorry we missed you*, Dillin continues to pair her built environments with found objects, but also responds to this moment in time, marked by a global pandemic and the ongoing economic decline of businesses nationwide.

She references the closed storefronts near her home in Baltimore and uses materials that have become integral to our separation during the pandemic, such as Plexiglas. Many of the works are handcrafted by the artist to appear dilapidated and forgotten. In some cases, she pairs these sculptures with found objects acquired from stores recently closed, as arranged remnants to discover.

In Empty display (I want to throw my arms around you), Dillin creates three necklace stands as segmented busts, arranging them on an acrylic stand facing the wall. While they initially appear to be mass produced, each object takes on a different personality. The figures were live cast from three friends the artist was separated from during the pandemic, allowing Dillin to capture the bodies she could not touch. Uncoupled, a collection of objects leaning against a wall, includes a board with a pair of hat stands that seem to glance at one another through Plexiglas, representing the countless bodies that have been separated by these clear, plastic sheets. Hanging on, installed on the former altar space of the church, is composed of a dressing rack fabricated in steel and skewed and rusted to give the feel of a dilapidated sign post. Two neon objects designed by the artist hang from the form: a surrealist, glowing clothes hanger and an "open" sign that has lost its colors, barely hanging on to the rack.

Skeleton of retail is composed of mostly found objects and leftover display items from shuttered stores, stained by the artist in areas to add a sense of decay. This assembly of racks, shelves, and retail fixtures appears forgotten, but the intentional arrangement of these objects also shows Dillin's connection to the history of Minimalism and artworks by Sol LeWitt and Carl Andre.

Throughout the exhibition, Dillin acts as an “artist-archivist” documenting this time while also creating a collection of left-behind items with purpose. She puts such care into making and assembling these objects that she breathes new life into them. She captures isolation and social and physical distance, while expressing a deep emotional response to this moment. We see the artist missing her friends and community, showing solidarity and support for what others have lost, and advocated a need for rebuilding on all fronts.

Sorry we missed you

Pavers, etched brick, chewing gum, charcoal

6.5 x 96 x 18 inches

2021







This is the place we came to

Plywood, MDF, glass tile, copper tubing, paint, sand,
pennies, algae and mixed media

48 x 48 x 20 inches

2021





Skeleton of retail

Display fixtures, stone, coffee with cream and sugar,
plaster, wood, cheesecloth, epoxy, paint

74 x 144x 27 inches

2021





















Uncoupled

Slat board, hat stands, fabric, plastic sheeting,
wood, plaster, acrylic, oak, paint, adhesive,
packing blanket, vinyl

54 x 47 x 26 inches

2021





Empty display (I want to throw my arms around you)

Acrylic, FGR Aquaresin, wood, flocking

40 x 61 x 33 inches

2021





Hanging on

Steel, paint, rust, concrete, glass neon with cables

53 x 60 x 55 inches

2021





A changing room

Masonite, plywood, steel, drywall, paint,
latex caulk, vinyl

96 x 50x 53 inches

2021





Plinths for what came before

Component A
MDF, steel, paint
16 x 69 x 173 inches
2021

Component B
MDF, paint, laminate,
cotton sheet,
acrylic medium, vinyl
49 x 61 x 20 inches
2021











Photo credits go to Sarada Conaway. Much appreciation for her dedication to the documentation of this project.

Thank you to my husband Chip Banister for fabrication and installation support and to my many friends, family members, and colleagues who took the time to do periodic studio visits with me in preparation for this exhibition.

Special thanks to the Frederick Arts Council for their support of this series. Warm thanks to FAC's Charlotte Marra for her coordination of this exhibition.

Sorry we missed you exhibition dates 7 May - 28 August 2021 at the Frederick Art's Council's Arts Center at 5 East Second Street. Exhibition catalogue created July 2021 by Lisa Dillin. All images copyright Lisa Dillin 2021.