

SUSAN GILES

SPACE HAS BECOME THIS MATERIAL THING



DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

September 5–October 27, 2023

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In her solo exhibition *Space Has Become This Material Thing*, **Susan Giles** presents sculptures and drawings of hand gestures that accompany speakers' reflections of home. Invited participants – young adults and elderly citizens – have all recently transitioned to new homes. Their stories often describe how their perception of home changed during the pandemic as they, like so many, were isolated. The stories and gestures captured through this artwork serve as a point of social engagement through listening, sharing, and connecting personal to collective memory. The fleeting shapes and movements our hands make when we speak evoke characteristics of our embodied experience of the world. This work provides a lens through which to view spatial, audio, and embodied memories of home, and serves as a material repository of the recollections and remembered perceptions of each speaker.

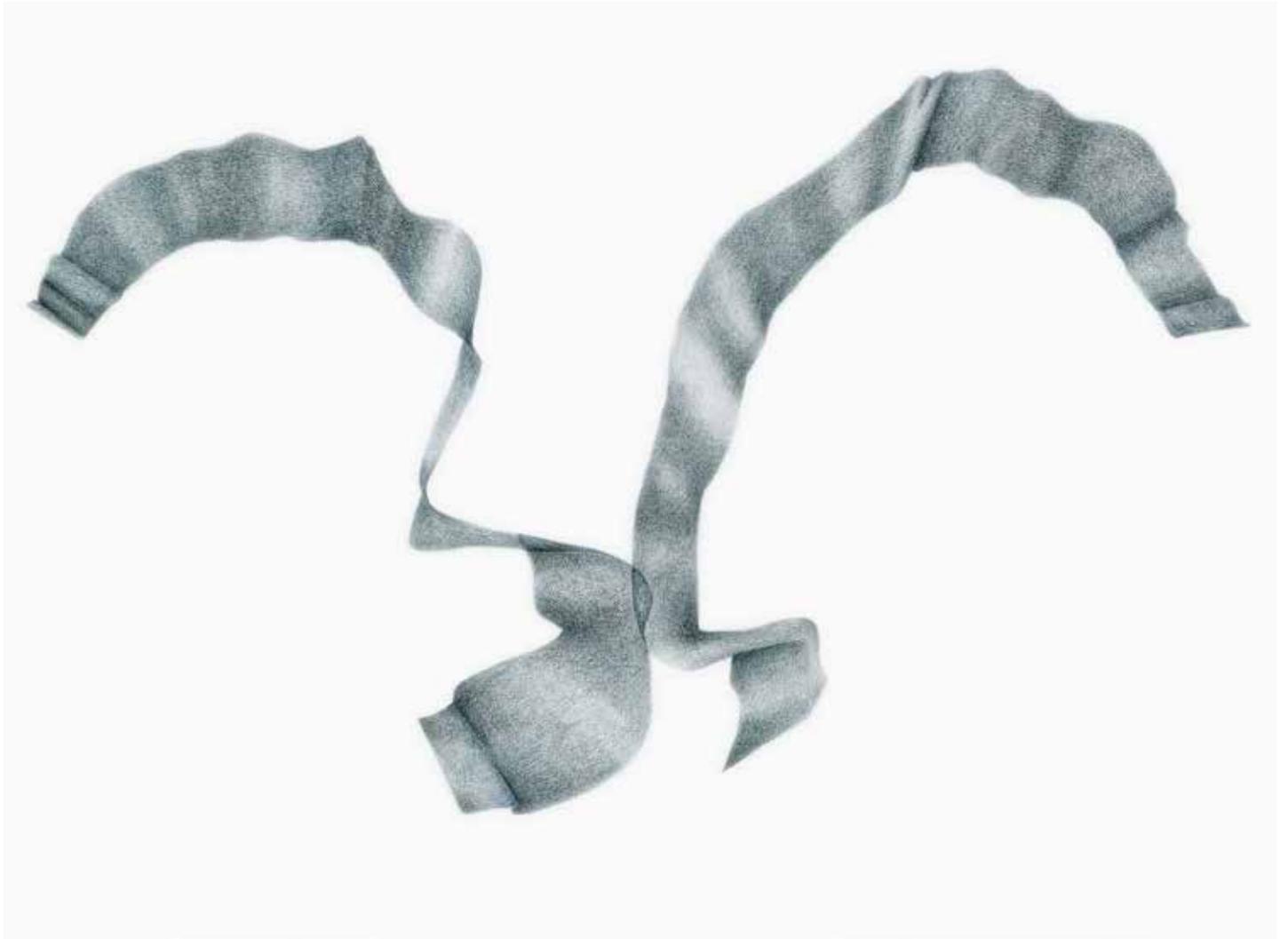
SUSAN GILES

Susan Giles's artwork explores the intersections of memory, communication, and physical presence. Individual and collective narratives of movement, monuments, architecture and landscape have informed her studio work. Recent interpretations of recalled experiences and corresponding hand gestures seek to define where language becomes sculptural.

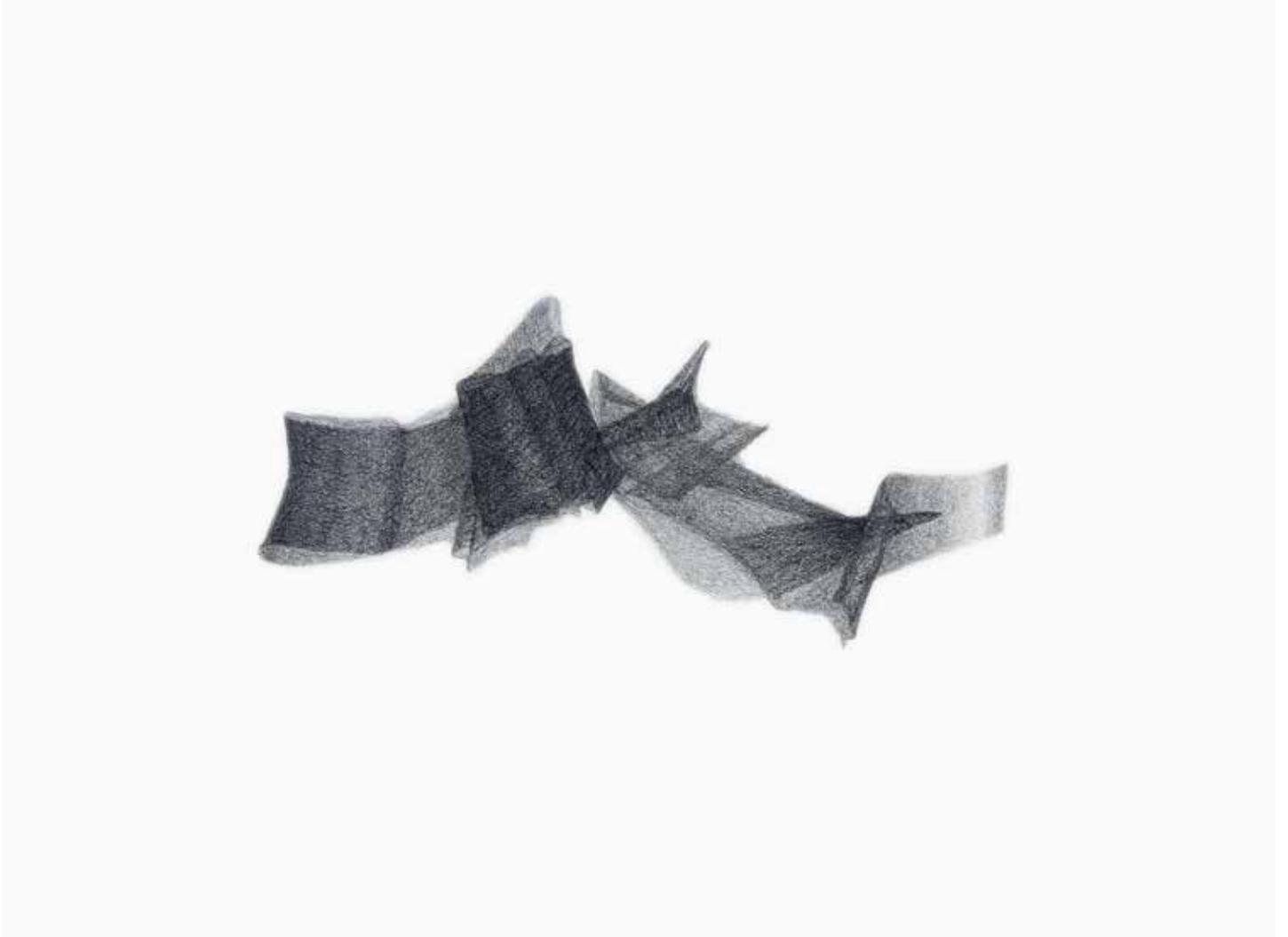
Giles' work has shown in Chicago at the Chicago Cultural Center, The Hyde Park Art Center, THE MISSION, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and The Renaissance Society, as well as Mixed Greens in New York, Galería Valle Ortí in Valencia, Spain, and Five Years, London, UK. Major commissions include a permanent sculpture for the University of Chicago in 2021 and a public art commission by Jason Rosenthal in memory of Amy Krouse Rosenthal for the Chicago Park District in 2019. In 2021 she was on Creative Capital's Shortlist. She has received numerous grants, including an Individual Artist Project Grant from DCASE in 2022, 2019, 2017 and 2015, awards from the Illinois Arts Council in 2014 and 2009, a 2005 Louis Comfort Tiffany Award and a 1998 Fulbright Grant to Indonesia. Giles is an Associate Professor in the Department of Contemporary Practices at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, a 2023 Visiting Teaching Fellow in Built Environment, Arts, Design & Architecture at University of New South Wales in Sydney, and a 2022-2023 Visiting Artist at Columbia College in Chicago.



Gestural Traces and Material Memory: Allan, 2022, Ink on Paper, 24" x 18"



Gestural Traces and Material Memory: Julia, 2022, Colored Pencil on Paper, 29" x 24"



Gestural Traces and Material Memory: Barb, 2022, Colored Pencil on Paper, 24" x 18"



Knowledge (Madison), 2021, honeycomb Cardboard, 10' x 17.25' x 8.76'
Photo Credit: Kip Wilkinson



Knowledge (Madison), 2021, Honeycomb Cardboard (Detail)
Photo Credit: Kip Wilkinson

INTERVIEW WITH SUSAN GILES

Conducted by Rachel Manlubatan

Rachel Manlubatan: What first drew you to gestural sculpture? How do you find gestures within normal conversations, body movements, architecture, and other seemingly casual concepts?

Susan Giles: My BFA is in sculpture and early on in my career I spent a year living and conducting research abroad. It was during that time that I became very aware of the non-verbal ways in which communication happens. I had to shift from focusing on language—which I was struggling to understand—to making meaning by paying more attention to gestures, movements, and spaces between the words. Eventually I realized that gestures are where communication becomes sculptural. By making gesture physical, I could extend the moment of speaking in order to see something of the speaker's experience of the world.

Regarding finding gestures within normal conversations, bodily movements, architecture, etc., I think of this in terms of drawing. It's about being able to zoom out and see the overall form and how it is positioned in space. You have to see and delineate that form in space and its movement before you can understand the details.

RM: Can you speak on what practices you explored initially to get to where you are currently in your artistic journey? What techniques have drawn you to and informed your sculpture?

SG: Early on I worked with video to see what was happening in gestures. I could scroll through footage of people speaking and isolate the gesture frame by frame. I experimented with frame animation to trace the movement of hands as well as long-exposure photography. These mediums were a direct way to slow down the moment of gesturing, but I still felt that I wanted to make the

gestures sculptural. When we make a gesture in describing something, we are making that thing nearly tangible through our hands if only for a moment. To me, the logical next step was to make it actually materially tangible.

RM: How does the different scale influence the aesthetics of your artwork?

SG: I think carefully about scale there are many factors that contribute to decisions I make about how big the work will be. I've used drawing and 3D printing to materialize gestures at approximately life-size. I'd like to be able to hand you a print of a gesture and you could re-trace that movement with your hands. Maybe that would give insight into the speaker's perceptions. Gestures can also carry information about scale so I often think about the scale that the speaker was trying to convey and use that to inform how big to make the work.

RM: Many of your projects are accompanied by stories told by varying participants. How has your work developed to include a more social aspect within your processes? What do you hope audiences gain from viewing your sculptures and drawings in relation to these interviews?

SG: Conversations are central to my work because they generate the content and gestural forms. There are different ways in which I approach this, but I will talk about a specific project called Gestural Traces and Material Memory as the drawings for this project are included in my show at Glass Curtain Gallery. It's a series of transcribed stories and drawings of hand gestures. The stories were shared by resident-members of a choir at a retirement home. The idea of home and our experience of home provide the springboard for the stories. The stories and gestures also serve as source material

INTERVIEW CONTINUED

for music by Chicago composer Amy Wurtz, which are performed by the choir. It's our hope that this project serves as a point of social engagement as their stories are highlighted and shared outside of the retirement home.

RM: In what ways have you grown as an artist through the people you meet and your creative procedures? Where would you like to see your projects go next?

SG: It's the conversations that I have with the participants and with other artists, curators, and writers that spark ideas and growth for me as an artist. In fostering these interactions, I feel more connected and driven to make the work the best it can be in order to honor those conversations. As far as what is next, I'm beginning a collaboration with an artist in the UK and an architect in Australia. Although I have worked separately with each of these two before, we're really excited to see what kind of synergies will happen together and to open up our respective communities.



THE DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

The DEPS Artist Profile Series presented by Columbia College Chicago's Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), is a virtual publication on select artists involved with the DEPS Galleries and the Columbia College Chicago community. Our goal with this series is to connect artist and viewer on a deeper level, and to highlight the amazing works and thoughts of our featured artists through interviews, artist biographies, and catalogs of work. Art has always been a way to connect with others, no matter where one may physically be. We hope by presenting the creativity and insights of the people involved in the DEPS Artist Profile Series that viewers may have one more way to stay in touch with and support the arts community. The DEPS Artist Profile Series and graphic design is managed by DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Rachel Manlubatan. This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

Learn more at: colum.edu/deps

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Glass Curtain Gallery: 1104 S Wabash Ave, First Floor, Chicago, IL 60605

Gallery Hours: Monday–Friday 9 a.m.–5 p.m.