

EXPERIMENTATIONS: The Art of Controlled Procedures

Dca



Los
Angeles
Municipal
Art
Gallery



Educator's Guide

The Show.

Experimentation n. the action or process of trying out new ideas, methods, or activities.

Experimentations: The Art of Controlled Procedures celebrates the playful fusion of art and science, and demonstrates how controlled procedures and a spirit of inquiry can lead to exciting and unexpected artistic outcomes. The exhibition invites viewers to engage with the artworks not just as finished products, but as manifestations of ongoing processes of discovery and exploration.

Starting from a place of wonder, experimentation, and excitement, the artists in this exhibition explore the creation of innovative artworks. They embrace a spirit of inquiry and curiosity, much like scientists in a laboratory using methods similar to those used during the research process. Multidisciplinary artworks span a diverse range of two and three dimensional media, installation, multimedia, interactive, and performative works - all at the intersection of art and science.

Artists in the exhibition include Carmen Argote, John Baldessari, Merce Cunningham, Charles Gaines, Jesper Just, Shana Lutker, Benjamin Reiss, and Analia Saban.

Land Acknowledgement.

It is important that the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery prioritize respect for both the historic culture and the contemporary presence of indigenous peoples throughout California, and especially in the Los Angeles area. To that end, and particularly as a public and civic institution, we acknowledge that our gallery resides on what was historically the homeland of Kizh, Tongva, and Chumash peoples who were dispossessed of their land.

If you would like to learn more about the land you are on please visit this [link](#).

The Artist.



Photo courtesy of the artist

Carmen Argote (b. 1981, Guadalajara, Mexico) is a multidisciplinary artist, creating artworks in a variety of media. One of the foundations of her art practice includes spatial exploration when creating site-specific artwork. She uses slow walking and observation to help develop her “visual language.” Part of her creative process is to fully explore each environment where her art will be exhibited. She moves around the built environment, spending time walking around and through the area to fully experience all aspects of the space. Exploring the space creates an awareness of her physical body, the physicality of making art such as painting, personal history, class social systems, how items are used or discarded, and ultimately, ideas of home and her relation to place. She states that the process “builds my understanding of the relationships between personal history, memory, cultural systems, and the collective energy in society.” Her experiential process creates connections between her various artforms. Argote’s current practice explores her own “psychic landscape,” of how she is feeling to gain a greater awareness of herself through various experiences.

The Artist.

Carmen Argote received an MFA and BFA from University of California, Los Angeles (2007, 2004). Solo exhibitions have been held at Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2023); Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (2022); Primary, Nottingham (2021); Clockshop, Los Angeles (2020); Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles (2020, 2018); New Museum, New York (2019); and PAOS, Guadalajara (2019). Argote's work is in the collections of Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach.

The Artwork.



Play Space, 2024

Acrylic and potato print on canvas

10 feet diameter

Courtesy of the artist and
Commonwealth and Council

Photo by Cedric Tsai

The artworks in this exhibit are from a new body of work, which represent the intersection of play, artmaking, and therapy. ***Play Space*** was realized from her desire to “breakthrough,” describing the art as “transitory.” A breakthrough is a change of perspective and can occur from exploring new ideas and creative processes, gaining more knowledge, making discoveries, and coming to new realizations and understanding about ourselves. A positive breakthrough can apply to any aspect of life, how we create art, think and feel. Transitory means that something, such as a feeling or state of mind is always changing or in a state of change.

The artist’s daily experiences and long walks where she practices slow looking and observations are an important part of her experiential research process and art practice. The materials that Argote uses as inspiration are discovered during walks throughout the city. She occasionally gathers found objects and repurposes them. Argote records her observations using photographs and voice memos. She then reflects on the visual and auditory fragments of her observations and uses them as part of her paintings, drawings, installations, video, and performance works.



Play Space, 2024

Acrylic and potato print on canvas
10 feet diameter

Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council

Courtesy of the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs / Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery.
Photo by Robert Wedemeyer.

Discussion Prompts.

In her art practice, Carmen Argote explores the creative process through play, experimenting, being mindful, observing her surroundings and being open to new experiences.

- Describe the colors, marks, lines and shapes in this painting and what is unique about this artwork.
- What do you think about when looking at this artwork? What do you think the artist was feeling when she created this? What do you feel when you look at this artwork?
- What artmaking tools or other materials might have been used and where do you see proof of this in the artwork? Describe the steps or process you would use to create a large-scale colorful abstract painting. What everyday object or unusual item could you use to create a painting?
- How can being mindful and slowing down to think about what you are doing in school or while making artwork help with learning, studying and creating?
- How might changing your perspective (way of thinking) or physically changing your environment change your experiences?
- How does this artwork and the process the artist used relate to the title of this exhibition - *Experimentations*?

The Artwork.



Figure 2, *rejected paintings*, 2024

Acrylic on canvas

19 x 43 x 9 inches

Courtesy of the artist and
Commonwealth and Council

Courtesy of the City of Los Angeles
Department of Cultural Affairs /
Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery.
Photo by Robert Wedemeyer.

One of the results of Carmen Argote's experimental, exploratory process is the discovery of new ideas. These unexpected discoveries often lead to new perspectives and realizations about herself.

This mixed-media sculpture symbolizes ideas of repurposing and reusing materials. In her physical action of tearing up her rejected painted canvases, she repurposes them into a three-dimensional form as a sculpture, that becomes a figurative form. This process is about new perspectives, transformation, accomplishing something new, the process of reaching a goal, and a new state of being as a breakthrough. This artwork is about experimenting, trying new ideas, and learning that with experimentation and failures, that new discoveries and learning occur, and new artworks are created.

In the study of psychology, the process of discovering new aspects about ourselves is referred to as "self-actualization," which Psychologist Dr. Abraham Maslow wrote about in his "Hierarchy of Needs." This is the highest level of psychological development and includes creativity, spontaneity, acceptance, morality, experiencing our purpose, meaning, and discovering our inner potential.

Discussion Prompts.

- What could this be? What does the shape and form cause you to think about?
- How would you describe this sculpture? What materials do you think were used in this three-dimensional artwork?
- What story do you think the artist could be expressing in this artwork?
- What title would you give this artwork and why?
- What is your favorite activity and how does it communicate something about you?
- Write a list of words to describe what it feels like when you are being creative while making an artwork, writing, dancing, playing an instrument or playing sports.
- Write or tell about a time that you discovered something new and special about yourself after you created an artwork, finished a project, wrote a story or poem, read a book, explored something special or visited a new place. How did this experience provide the feeling of accomplishment, satisfaction or wellbeing?

The Artist.



Photo by Justin John Greene

Benjamin Reiss (b. 1985, Los Angeles, CA) is an artist based in Los Angeles, working primarily in sculpture. His practice explores the process of how everyday, common objects work together as a whole, to learn, understand function, form, and the intricacies of how they are created. His creative process begins with extensive research into the mechanics of the object. For each sculpture, he starts with what he refers to as a “simple question” of how it works and how did this object come to be? The making of objects can be interpreted as playful elements incorporated into his creative process.

Reiss received an MFA from University of California, Irvine in 2022 and a BFA from School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2007. Reiss has been featured in solo and two-person exhibitions at Hunter Shaw Fine Art, Los Angeles (2023, with Michael Kennedy Costa); Harkawik, Los Angeles (2021); Bel Ami, Los Angeles (2018); and Actual Size, Los Angeles (2014, with Connor Thompson). Recent group exhibitions include Tell Me What You Want, Bel Ami, Los Angeles (2023); Life Like, JOAN, Los Angeles (2022); No More Land West, Visitor Welcome Center, Los Angeles (2020); and Deeper Than Inside, High Art, Paris (2019).

The Artwork.



Door Lock, 2022

Styrene, wood, epoxy, plaster, acrylic, PVC, steel, Durham's putty, Diet Coke caps, chair, table, cutting board, automotive wire, cocktail swords, squeeze bottles, white sand, paint, graphite

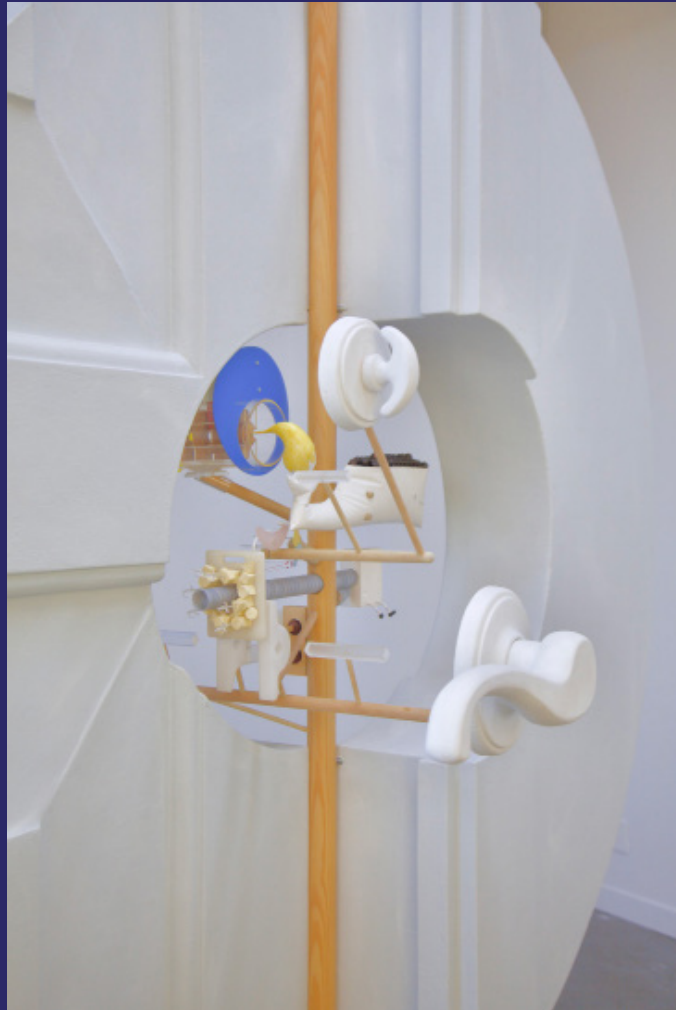
96" x 74" x 45"

Courtesy of the artist

Courtesy of the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs / Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery. Photo by Robert Wedemeyer.

Each complex, intricate, machine-like sculpture has multiple components. Reiss fabricates each element of his sculpture. He looks for an understanding of each facet of the object; how it works, how machines work, while considering the principles of physics. He says that “associations bloom” from various items, including ads, food, body parts, cartoons, toys, housewares, symbols, educational materials and other items. Elements then begin to emerge during the research and making process, finally “revealing the enormous, unconscious contours of understanding.”

He makes connections and associations with pop cultural references, ads, symbols, cartoons, toys, and so much more. He says he is amazed that new understandings are “always formed of one's prior building blocks...” This process generally illuminates a set of problems and meanings. His artworks reference the body as a machine and can be a metaphor for his personal narratives. As he creates and constructs each sculpture, he is seeking understanding and awareness of the components.



***Door Lock*, 2022 (Detail)**

Styrene, wood, epoxy, plaster, acrylic, PVC, steel, Durham's putty, Diet Coke caps, chair, table, cutting board, automotive wire, cocktail swords, squeeze bottles, white sand, paint, graphite

96" x 74" x 45"

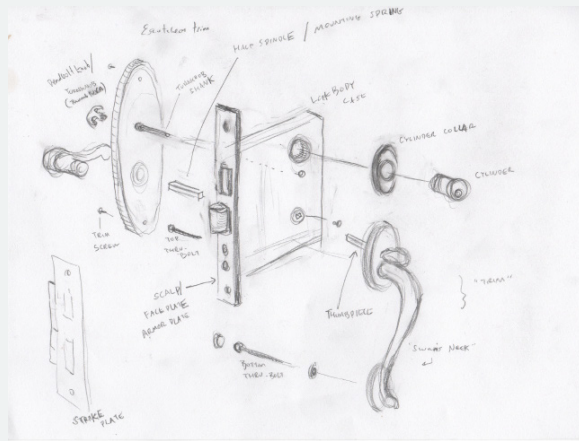
Courtesy of the artist

Discussion Prompts.

Artist Benjamin Reiss explores how everyday objects are created and how they function. Through his experimental process he discovers the how's and why's of each element of his sculptures which show and explore everyday mundane objects.

- What is the first thing you notice in this sculpture?
- Describe the materials the artist used and why you think he used them.
- How do you think this was built? How does each element interact with the other?
- Imagine you were an artist or scientist, what steps would you take to create a large-scale sculpture that tells a story about something we see and use each day?
- Why is it important to take the time to notice everyday objects and think about how we use them?
What can we discover that will help us be creative and gain understanding of how objects function?

The Artwork.



Notes for Door Lock, 2022

Graphite, colored pencil on paper

9 x 12 inches

Courtesy of the artist

For *Door Lock*, Reiss explored the inner and outer elements of how a door locks and opens. His drawings and investigations into how objects function are experimentations using playful elements. Reiss' art practice and creative process involve planning each sculpture, researching every aspect of the object, keeping extensive notes, and creating numerous sketches. He studies diagrams, schematics, drawings, instructions, textbooks and museum displays to learn the inner workings of everyday, often mundane objects to create his drawings. He then deconstructs, which is to examine each part of the object, by creating a series of sketches, drawings, and writing notes. The amount of detail provides insight to his creative and thinking process as he explores the various options to create and fabricate his sculptures. The long, detailed process and actions during the construction of his sculptures use his knowledge of fabrication of artworks and objects.

Discussion Prompts.

- How does the artist's drawing help the viewer understand how a door lock works?
- Why do you think an artist would devote hours to creating sketches and taking notes about an object?
- What are some ways that taking time to study and research something could help you learn?
- Describe how research and sketches (drawings) express experimental ideas, learning and discovering?
- As a student, how can the process of exploring, researching, note taking, drawing and critical thinking help you with what you study and learn in school?
- How does experimenting relate to science? How might experimentation and play help an artist create an artwork?

Art Activity: Drawing Each Breath

Colors and lines can express feelings, emotions and breathing. Drawing is a mindful way to represent the rhythm and pattern of breathing by creating an abstract drawing. Mindfulness is when you are aware of your senses, feelings and thoughts, the rhythm of breathing and your experience in the moment. It can be a time when we relax and are kind to ourselves.

What you will need:

- 1-2 pieces of any type and size paper, recycled paper, or the inside of a brown paper bag
- Drawing utensils

Optional: Various colors of paper, other items to create lines, music of your choice

**Please check with a parent, guardian or teacher before using any supplies or equipment.*

Art Activity: Drawing Each Breath

Step 1: You are invited to sit in a comfortable place and position. Close your eyes and relax. Notice how your breath flows in and out of your nose or mouth. Is it slow or quick? How can you slow it down? Think of what you are feeling before you start your drawing. What colors, lines and shapes do you imagine when you breathe?

Step 2: Open your eyes. Think of how you are feeling at this moment as you prepare to start drawing.

Step 3 : Place your paper horizontally (lengthwise side to side). Choose a color or colors to represent your breathing.

Step 4: Start with one color at either edge of the paper, about halfway between the top and bottom. As you inhale, take a long, slow breath in and at the same time draw a straight or curvy line going upwards as far as you want on the paper.

Step 5: Using the same color or another one, exhale slowly and draw the line going downward and close to the first line.

Art Activity: Drawing Each Breath

Step 6: The top and bottom of each line can have a small or large amount of space between them. Repeat inhaling and exhaling, and the drawing process until the lines of each breath cover the paper going across or in any direction you choose.

Step 7: You can add and layer lines on top of each other to represent each breath, you can turn the paper over and repeat, or use a new piece of paper.

Step 8: After you have finished your drawing, what do you notice? How do you feel now? You can write or share with a parent, guardian, teacher or your class what you discovered about the rhythm of each breath and the design and patterns your lines created.

Optional ideas: Play music that relaxes you. Use curvy, straight, zig zag, curly-cue or other types of lines to represent different breathing rhythms and patterns. You can experiment with your breathing by doing quick or slow inhales and exhales and drawing what those look like to you. Another idea is to continue adding lines to the paper to create an abstract artwork.

Resources.

Carmen Argote: <https://carmenargote.com/> | **IG:** @carmen.argote

Benjamin Reiss: <https://www.benjaminreiss.net/> | **IG:** @benjamin.reiss_

Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us, by Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross.

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Cover (left to right):

Benjamin Reiss, *Door Lock*, 2022. Styrene, wood, epoxy, plaster, acrylic, PVC, steel, Durham's putty, Diet Coke caps, chair, table, cutting board, automotive wire, cocktail swords, squeeze bottles, white sand, paint, graphite, 96" x 74" x 45." Courtesy of the Artist.

Carmen Argote, *Figure 2, rejected paintings*, 2024. Acrylic on Canvas, 19 x 43 x 9 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council.

Both images courtesy of the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs / Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery. Photos by Robert Wedemeyer.

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