

THINGS AT REST

by

AUDREY TRAVIS

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THINGS AT REST

Thesis approved:

Cameron Schoepp, Committee Chair, School of Art

Nick Bontrager, School of Art

Richard Lane, School of Art

H. Joseph Butler, Associate Dean, College of Fine Arts

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VITA.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
THINGS AT REST.....	1
PLATES.....	8

VITA

Audrey Travis was born March 6, 1993, in Roswell, New Mexico. She is the daughter of Rebecca Wales and Karl Travis. She graduated from R.L. Paschal High School in 2011 in Fort Worth, Texas, and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting from the Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, Georgia in 2014.

In August 2015, Audrey enrolled in Texas Christian University for graduate studies in Studio Art. While working on her Master of Fine Arts, concentrating in Sculpture, she worked with the Galleries at TCU (2015-2016), performed as a teaching assistant in Drawing I and Design and Color (2016-2017), and was a teacher of record in Design and Color (2017-2018).

ABSTRACT

I am drawn to the monolithic. Large, powerful, and intractably indivisible, these structures evoke permanence and gravity. I see these qualities in monuments of pure form and material, masses of stone, and pieces of architecture. I am interested in incorporating this language in my work, using simple acts and interventions to emulate the purity and gravity of these structures. The exhibition *THINGS AT REST* explores these concepts while introducing elements of fragility and impermanence as a way to challenge the grandiose and monumental.

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These qualities – pressure and permanence – are epitomized in our interactions with stone. I considered this relationship after encountering names carved into the sheer faces of great cliffs. The marks are graphic and sharp, hinting at labored efforts. These moments fascinate me as I consider the implications of our relationship with lasting stone. There is an intended permanence to these actions which speaks to our need to immortalize. I see obvious continuities among these scrawled carvings, ancient petroglyphs, and the precise texts inscribed in contemporary plaques and memorials.

Throughout this body of work, I have looked to the humble units of granite which are used as tombstones with similar importance as more imposing monuments such as the Pyramids of Giza. Though the scale of these structures

varies, these hewn forms are intended to function as enduring reminders. They are meant to stand forever as testaments to moments in time and identities. This urge to leave marks illustrates the need to engage the eternal life of the elemental.

But even stone is not everlasting. It is weathered by time and worn by events, reduced to ruins. These formidable markers ultimately fail, only able to briefly last into their intended timeline. There is defeat in their rifts, worn surfaces, and toppled forms. A formal language is established in this entropy. There is an allure in these moments of fissure and a certain romanticism in their decline.

The obelisk standing in Central Park, New York, known as *Cleopatra's Needle*, and the Berlin Wall, both manifest this quality.

The abrupt base of *Cleopatra's Needle* (Plate 1) tapers where it had initially toppled. Its rounded foundation meets a sharp cube of stone and seems almost to balance there. The disjunction between the two shapes creates a sense of tension and alerts the viewer to the reality that this structure was moved here. Thousands of years after its production, the granite obelisk now stands alone – its hieroglyphics worn, edges rounded, and surface pitted.

The Berlin Wall (Plate 2), whose structure still remains in areas across the city, stands fragmented and defaced not by thousands of years of existence, but by purposeful destruction. I am interested in its wake and in the implied and literal boundary it created. It is a monument which extended horizontal lengths instead of vertical heights. It now acts as a kind of memorial, a function completely distinct from its original.

Among such objects, I have found a specific language that teeters between the blunt and the subtle, the massive and the unimposing, the haphazard and the refined.

THINGS AT REST emulates those moments found in stressed architecture, in broken headstones, and in amateur masonry repair jobs. I am drawn to those places where materials shift and weight creates arches of tension. By incorporating this language, I emulate the purity and gravity of these structures, while acknowledging their imperfections.

Throughout the production of the work in this exhibition, I referenced specific objects which exhibit those moments of contact and pressure. Particularly, I looked to the tombstones which have been cleanly fractured that clutter cemeteries (Plate 3). Some lie unrepaired, crudely stacked together. Others have been mended, leaving a line of pale grout between pieces. There is an elegance in the moments where these pieces are joined. *Skewed Form* (Plate 4) uses those points of contact, refining those imperfect transitions where stone touches stone. Consisting of a long piece of white marble, the sculpture leans against the wall. At eye level the stone has been cut diagonally and mended. There is a faint seam indicating the separation, but the two pieces have been aligned slightly off kilter. Instead of a perfect transition, the two segments meet askew and change the strong vertical line to a fragmented one. The work is fragile in this connection, but also in its lean.

Several pieces in this exhibition utilize this incline. *Propped Monument* (Plate 5), a tall piece of quartzite pressing a brick against the wall, also

incorporates this angled position. My decision to use this haphazard lean was a labored one. Instead of beveling the top and bottom of the pieces to fit flush against the floor and wall, I chose to leave them casually propped. The impermanence of their stacked positions introduces a potential for change and complicates the shift from stone to concrete and drywall. I see similar decisions in the work of John McCracken, whose glossy planks bridge floor and wall. McCracken's planks (Plate 6) stand as human scaled slabs and incorporate a similar position. In *Propped Monument*, this pressured lean also functions to hold a small brick in place. The brick repeats the missing semicircular section of the quartzite in its own incomplete shape. Barely touching, the edge of the stone holds the brick several feet in the air, disrupting the meeting of quartzite and wall and introducing a new point of contact.

The points of pressure where two things touch create moments of tension throughout the exhibition. I am sensitive to those places where elements shift from one material to another, integrating fluid transitions and abrupt intersections.

The work of Gabriel Kuri depends on those points of contact. Kuri's sculpture, *Three Arrested Clouds* (Plate 7), incorporates two boulders and three balled socks. Between the two rocks, the socks are held in a precarious line, kept in place by tension. Only this slight compression is holding the delicate system together. An important influence in my practice, the juxtapositions I see in Kuri's work mirror the formal moments that I am referencing.

Across the gallery two blocks of graphite titled *Stacked Blocks*, sit on the floor (Plate 8). The edge of one block rests atop the other. The space created

between the work and the floor is a narrow triangle. That same narrow shape is repeated in the other block of graphite, which is propped to match its mate. The pieces of graphite are cut at regular angles, creating a zig-zagged surface. These metallic forms catch light and cast slight, crooked shadows onto the floor.

“Bound together in such a way that they create a maximum resistance to perceptual separation,”¹ these objects are understood as a whole, and not merely as parts. This sense of unity is present in the work of minimalist artists including Donald Judd and Robert Morris. Judd’s boxes (Plate 9) similarly incorporate this intuitive repetitive form.

Another formal recurrence throughout the exhibition is the use of a subtle curve. This soft arch introduces a sense of flexibility which contradicts the monumental. Although this act defies the strength and rigidity of the monolithic, these objects still exist as such. The work still feels singular, heavy, and formal in its material and simplicity.

Adjacent to *Stacked Blocks*, two pieces of thin copper cast curved reflections against one another. One sits flat while the second lays on its side, arching from one corner of the long floor piece to the other. (Plate 10) Here, the polished surface of both elements creates convex and concave arcs in the inevitable reflections. The work seems to be transparent, casting a copper tinge to the floor reflected in it. Though delicately balanced, these metal sheets read as a singular form – one intrinsic to the other.

¹ Robert Morris. *Notes on Sculpture, Parts 1 & 2*, reprinted in Battcock, ed. *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), 266.

Also incorporating this soft curve are several thin pieces of white marble which stand flush against gallery wall (Plate 11). Some tightly lean, while others curve, tapering out to the floor. Here, I have found potential in the seemingly infeasible act of bending stone. This solid material is given flexibility, appearing to bend at its own weight and creating new points of touch as it sits against the wall and barely meets the floor. The slight, soft curve of the work seems natural, yet contradicts the veins of gray through white that identify it as marble. These arcs have not been tediously carved, but rather, bent. Though it is unintuitive, there is nothing untruthful about its flexed state.

As I examine these unyielding structures of stone, I consider the implied sacred space that surrounds a monument. Sometimes this hallowed ground is literal (it denotes where a body lie, or where an event took place), though I am interested in some other quality of that ambiguous space. The work in this exhibition is a means towards processing this elusive quality. Hence, the gallery has been arranged sparsely, allowing each object to be encountered individually (Plate 12). This restrained curation allows for a more quiet, intimate interaction.

The brick and plaster *Monoliths* (Plate 13), which occupy their own room, address space in a different way. Instead of existing independently, each of these small works is arranged to relate to the other. The interaction of texture, color, and shape dictate the placement of each piece. The resulting installation is meant to challenge, as well as to evoke the grandiose and monumental. Although they are small and impermanent, these brittle objects have a certain purity and gravity.

Throughout my work, I reference immense structures of stone and indivisible forms. **THINGS AT REST** challenges those immutable objects. The work is impermanent, simple, and unadorned, elevating the inconsequential and defying the eternal. It contains the disquiet of failure and fragility – a room full of resting monoliths which might slip at any moment.

PLATES



Plate 1: Cleopatra's Needle, Central Park, New York, New York, United States, 1450 BC, themetmuseum.org



Plate 2: Berlin Wall, Berlin, Germany, 1961, apimages.com



Plate 3: *Joined Granite*, Digital Photograph, 2017



Plate 4: *Skewed Form*, Marble, 2018



Plate 5: *Propped Monument*, Quartzite and brick, 2018



Plate 6: John McCracken, exhibition view *John McCracken: Planks*, Venus Over Manhattan, 2017, <http://venusovermanhattan.com/exhibition/john-mccracken/>



Plate 7: Gabriel Kuri, *Three Arrested Clouds*, Two rocks and three pairs of balled socks, 2010, pietmondriaan.com



Plate 8: *Stacked Blocks*, Graphite, 2018



Plate 9: Donald Judd, *Untitled*, Copper, ten units with 9-inch intervals, 1969, Guggenheim.org



Plate 10: *Curved Form*, Copper, 2018



Plate 11: *Resting Forms*, Marble, 2018



Plate 12: *THINGS AT REST* Exhibition view, 2017



Plate 13: *Monoliths* installation view, Bricks and plaster, 2017