

trimming  
placing  
mending  
holding  
tending  
supporting  
caring

# **fitting**

Rachael Starbuck  
Michael Muelhaupt  
Jesse Cline

March 25 – April 30, 2022

**Rachael Starbuck**

fitting

*The work we have been making for this show is a collection of moments of touch and care. Together we are building support structures; for ourselves, for each other, for the things we tend to. We build structure in wood, clay and brass; in routine and repetitive motion; by watering, trimming, propping and problem-solving. Shifting to modes of practice that offer concrete support and feedback feels generative and fitting — does this object hold weight, is this plant growing, do these pieces fit?*

*These things provide points of contact, creating many small moments of connection and support.*

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*My plant collection originates in large part from cuttings I've gathered from friends and family. Many of my most prized specimens have come from my Mother's yard in Miami. I associate my plants with the people and places they came from and caring for them often feels like a moment of intimacy, a connection across distance. Perpetually drawn to collect tropical plants, like the ones that abundantly surrounded me growing up in South Florida, I am constantly attempting to provide ideal conditions for my tender transplants in their new Texas home. In the (semi)controlled environment of the greenhouse I am transported for a brief moment to lush, green, sweltering warmth; 160 square feet of Miami in Austin. My Mom moved out of the home I grew up in this summer, I can never return to that place or bring home leaves and vines and cactus pads from that yard again. The greenhouse containing my collection of plants has become an invaluable and fragile record of my roots.*

*Propagated plants are a lineage, a site or vessel for memory, a practice, a gift, a theft, their iterations maintain a connection.*

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## **mother plant:**

*Many of the plants in this show are offspring from a single plant—a pencil cactus grown from a cutting I got from my Aunt Chris while visiting family in New Hampshire over ten years ago. The cutting was a small stick about four inches long. I took it back to Richmond, VA where I was living at the time and planted it. For two years it didn't die but it didn't grow. I moved to New Orleans, bringing it with me, and placed it in the backyard of my new home. We lived in New Orleans for two years and it finally started growing, eventually needing a new pot. We moved to Austin and the pencil cactus came along. It lived on the kitchen counter in our North Loop apartment, on the front porch of our Dancy St. house, in the backyard in Skyview. The pencil cactus loves Texas and is now over eight feet tall, currently living in the small greenhouse we built adjoining our studio.*

*Last summer it reached the top of the greenhouse—branches curling, pressing and pushing against the shade cloth roof, distorted with the effort to continue an upward trajectory. I finally gave in and chopped a foot off the top, repotting it to make a new plant. The big pencil quickly*

*grew three new branches at the site of the cut and those all reached the roof within a month, pressing up and out again. I have since had to trim the same plant countless times to keep it contained in the safe warmth of the greenhouse. This process has resulted in many new plants, each on their own upward trajectory, exploring their space, reaching, stretching, and navigating around their bounds.*

**—Rachael Starbuck**

## OBJECTS:

### handhold (8-16)

Date: 2022

Materials: pit fired ceramic, wax, cork

### pothos (pothos) v3

Date: 2022

Materials: paper clay cast from molds made of giant pothos leaves brought to Texas from Miami

## POTS:

*The plants are held in slip cast ceramic pots made of reclaimed clay from many iterations of Michael's previous work. Their forms are cast from cloth and canvas bags each filled with different materials. Soil, sand, seeds and rope bulge and press against the bounds of their vessels; modes of containing overlaid on each other. Some pots are fresh and new, some cracked and singed, then dipped in Rit dye and patched back together—mended and bathed in blue.*

## PLANTS:

### AV001.01

#### **Aloe Vera**

Provenance: propagated from a plant that had been set out with the trash in our old neighborhood

Date of accession: 2014

Notes: Michael rescued the original plant and affectionately refers to them all as his “trash aloes”

### CT001

#### **Cat Tails Euphorbia (*I think?*)**

Provenance: Originally belonged to Ryan Hawk and was left with us when he moved to Houston

Date of accession: Sometime before 2017

Notes: rumor is a column from our Dancy St. house fell on this plant when it lived on the front porch

### CT001.01-02

#### **Cat Tails Euphorbia**

Provenance: propagated from CC001

Date of accession: 2020

DF001.01-02

**Dragon Fruit**

Provenance: grown from a cutting I took from a dragon fruit growing up a 20 ft tall schefflera in my mom's front yard in Miami

Date of accession: 2021

GP001.01-02

**Golden Pothos**

Provenance: pothos grown from a cutting from the yard of my childhood home in Miami, FL. The large leaves have since dropped but it continues growing smaller leaves.

Date of accession: maybe 2018?

Notes: Something took big bites out of one of its vines in the greenhouse (maybe squirrels?!)

MD001.03

**Monstera Deliciosa**

Provenance: propagated from a monstera Jesse gave me for my birthday years ago

Date of accession: 2018 (?)

OC001.01-02

**Orchid Cactus (epiphyllum)**

Provenance: honestly have no idea where the first orchid cactus I had came from

Date of accession: sometime before 2017

Notes: I've also heard this plant called a night blooming cereus, and mine do occasionally make really incredible white blooms in the evening that wilt by the time the sun comes up.

PB001.01

**Pachypodium Bispinosum**

Provenance: propagated from a plant Sean Carney and Claire Mirocha left us when they moved

Date of accession: 2020

## PC001

### **Pencil Cactus**

Provenance: pencil cactus grown from a cutting taken from my Aunt Chris in NH in 2011

Date of accession: 2011

Notes: Plant currently measures ~8 ft tall x 4 ft, is continuously reaching the roof of the greenhouse where it resides. Propagated in Bethlehem, NH, then moved to Richmond, VA, then New Orleans, LA, then Austin, TX.

## PC001.01-04

### **Pencil Cactus**

Provenance: Propagated from PC001

Date of accession: 2020-21

Notes: All trimmed from the top of the mother plant when it reached the roof of the greenhouse.

## PC002

### **Firestick Pencil Cactus**

Provenance: Grown from a cutting taken while visiting friends in San Diego in 2017

Date of accession: 2017

## PC002.01-03

### **Firestick Pencil Cactus**

Provenance: Propagated from PC002

Date of accession: 2021

## PH001.01

### **Purple Heart**

Provenance: Pretty sure this was propagated from cuttings I stole from somewhere on the UT campus

Date of accession: between 2014-17

Notes: this plant was lent to Gabby Constantine to be a part of another artwork and then returned

## PP001.01

### **Prickly Pear Cactus (*I think?*)**

Provenance: collected from my Mom's backyard

Date of accession: 2021

Notes: The plant I took this cutting from was at least 15 ft tall and 8-10 ft wide

### SP001

#### **Variegated Spider Plant**

Provenance: Plucked from a spider plant that belonged to Amy Hautt and Jack Risley while dog sitting Pickle, their standard poodle

Date of accession: 2016

Notes: This plant once had a family of Carolina Wrens build a nest under its leaves

### SP001.01-02

#### **Variegated Spider Plant**

Provenance: Spider babies and grandbabies from SP001

Date of accession: 2019-22

### SP002.01

#### **Heirloom Green Spider Plant**

Provenance: Propagated from a plant that was gifted to me by Tamara Johnson from a plant given to her by Robert Gober from a plant that was given to him by Lee Krasner

Date of accession: 2019

### SS001

#### **Snake Plant (sansevieria)**

Provenance: dug out of my Mom's front yard in Miami

Date of accession: 2017

### UP001

#### **Umbrella Plant (schefflera)**

Provenance: probably got at a plant store in town?

Date of accession: maybe 2014-15?

Notes: Broke it's stem when it was knocked off a shelf by Squash when he was a little kitten in 2015 and was put on the front porch to die, but it grew back stronger—just slightly crooked

**N**

**S**

**Michael Muelhaupt**

fitting

*In the summer of 2018, I was hospitalized immediately following an MRI, and underwent surgery days later to remove a life threatening brain tumor. This event was, in so many ways, devastating. Attempting to trace its immensity and the multiplicity of rippling effects on my life in any sort of nuanced and generative way is for a different type of writing, a different type of work, maybe a different exhibition. For the purpose of this writing, I will say concretely and with certainty that it was financially devastating. Weeks after my highly fortunate departure from the hospital, my partner created a Go Fund Me account to help cover the costs of my rapidly accumulating medical bills and the future costs of time spent out of work, while I was at home—healing, recovering, getting comfortable walking again, but mostly sitting. Within days what I had imagined as an incredibly lofty goal was not only raised but blown past by a staggering amount.*

*Is it possible to define your community? This is an impossible question, with seemingly as many answers as there are ways to define what it even is. If it were something that could be measured, seen, held; would that be desirable? Scrolling down through the website's donation page, looking at a heartbreakingly long list of names I know; friends, former*

*classmates, colleagues, close and loose acquaintances, teachers, relatives, etc... I was given a rare window into what my own community looks like. A fuzzy but definable outline.*

*When I saw it, I cried. Alone in my car. Listening to the only reliably working CD I had in my car's CD player for years, Sign o' the Times. I gave it a chance because a trusted friend said it was his favorite Prince album. Now it's my favorite too. I cried because I was happy. Because I felt deeply embarrassed for not knowing how to see something so important that was right there the whole time. I cried because this was not the way I wanted or imagined being able to quantify my community. Not mixed up with money. Not on a big tech platform. Not born out of an emergency. But I was and still am overwhelmed with gratitude.*

*This fleeting window into my own network of support moved me in a way that I can say with almost absolute certainty no creative endeavor has come close. Possibly music on occasion? Sadly that moment cannot be captured or converted. It is fixed in a time and place. Contextualized by me. A paradigm shift for one.*

*Looking at the collection of functional objects in this room, I can see the soft affect of this experience surrounding them, although they could not be more distinct from one another. What IS here is a collection of chairs and tables, shelves and props. Objects of support for other objects. Things intended to be interacted with. Sat on. Touched. Objects to be lived with. They are made from materials that, as a whole, begin to attempt to outline a community in a different way. Materials found on the curb in my neighborhood, belts from my partner's father, Craigslist purchases, my old clothes, etc.*

*I wish I could say that this all was premeditated. A plan to manifest something abstract into something literal. One form of support into another. It wasn't, but does serve as evidence of a different trajectory for my work moving forward, for me moving forward with it.*

—Michael Muelhaupt

**a non-comprehensive list of materials featured in the exhibition:**

- Walnut lumber from felled trees as a result of extreme regional weather in Texas, milled in Georgetown and purchased in bulk from an unnamed seller on Craigslist
- The remaining Ash lumber from Rachael's sculpture "containing vessels" featured at Sweet Pass Sculpture Park in Dallas, Texas.
- Longleaf Heart Pine, reclaimed from a 19th century Alabama farmhouse, purchased in bulk on *Craigslist* from an unnamed seller
- Cherry lumber found stashed away at The University of Texas Fine Art studios, left over from artist and educator Jack Risley
- Ash dowels intended for a prototype that was no longer needed, purchased on *Craigslist* from an unnamed local tech entrepreneur

- Leather belts found in 2020, after having been stored in a Miami shed for decades. Originally owned by Rachael's late father, Fleet Starbuck, a blues musician and leather worker who sold belts and other leather goods on Austin's "drag" in the 1970s
- The tops of my old socks, deconstructed and re-sewn together with significant help and the expertise of friends, to upholster a recreation of a mid-century Hans Wegner chair; intended as a gift to my partner for Christmas
- Dental powder used in the denture making process, purchased online, mixed with epoxy resin
- Ikea maple dining table-top, found on the curbside for bulk trash collection in my neighborhood of Skyview.
- Ikea maple butcher-block, found on the curbside for bulk trash collection in my neighborhood of Skyview.
- 5 gallon Cambro food storage containers originally purchased for use in my thesis exhibition in 2017, titled *linger, loiter, loops*.
- A 20 gallon plastic tote-bin of disassembled Thonet chair legs and seats, originally the property of the University of Texas, Austin. Formerly the chairs used at the Cactus Cafe for many years. Purchased in parts on Craigslist from an unnamed seller.
- Low-fire clay recycled and reconstituted in many iterations, objects and artworks, originating from my thesis exhibition in 2017, titled "linger, loiter, loops." Again at Moon Mist Gallery in Houston, TX. Again at Sweet Pass Sculpture Park in Dallas, TX. Again at Gray Duck Gallery in Austin, TX. Featured here at Northern–Southern permanently fixed in the form of slip cast vessels created by Rachael to house many different types of plants.

**N**

**S**

**Jesse Cline**

holding patterns

*Cutting, slicing, rubbing, sanding, reorientation—the pause, the examination, the recalibration—willing something into existence.*

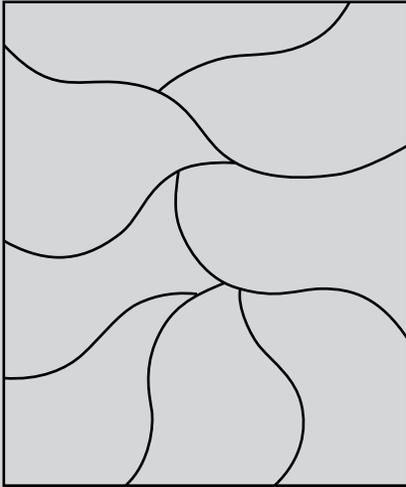
*A large motivation for the puzzles I've made is an attention to care, to perception, to intimacy, and to embodying/embracing a moment. Our perception of time is slippery, with seconds feeling like hours and days zipping away. I hope you will slow down and spend intimate moments with each piece in order to fully realize the whole. Handling them is contemplative.*

*I'm thinking about these puzzles as echoes, or maybe reverberations is a better word, of all the other pieces in the exhibition. Each of the puzzles are crafted from hardwood off-cuts that I repurposed from Michael's unneeded furniture parts, and all indirectly reference Rachael's plants with their caring supports. Every piece is in conversation with its sibling, or partner, or friend. Each describing a relationship with another, an individual block formed by those around it; we also form ourselves by those we surround ourselves with.*

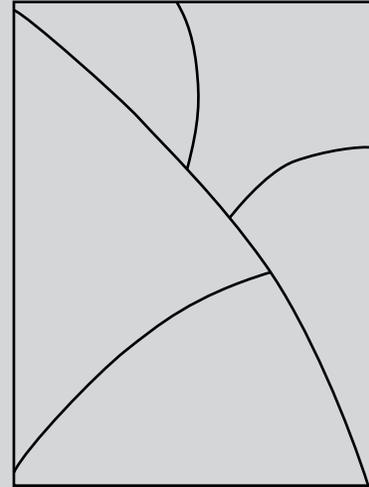
*So please enjoy these new ambiguous friends, perceive the minute, and in turn, sit with yourself, as a friend.*

—Jesse Cline

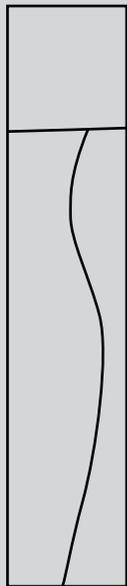
holding patterns:



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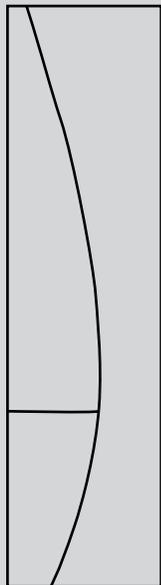


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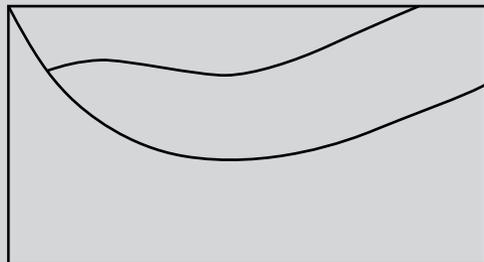
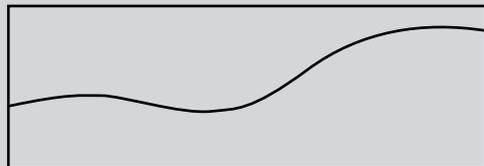
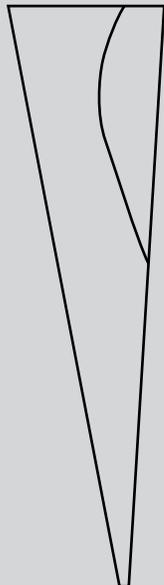


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Rachael Starbuck, Michael Muelhaupt, Jesse Cline

fitting

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organized by Phillip Niemeyer

facilitated by Northern–Southern

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**N**

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**S**