

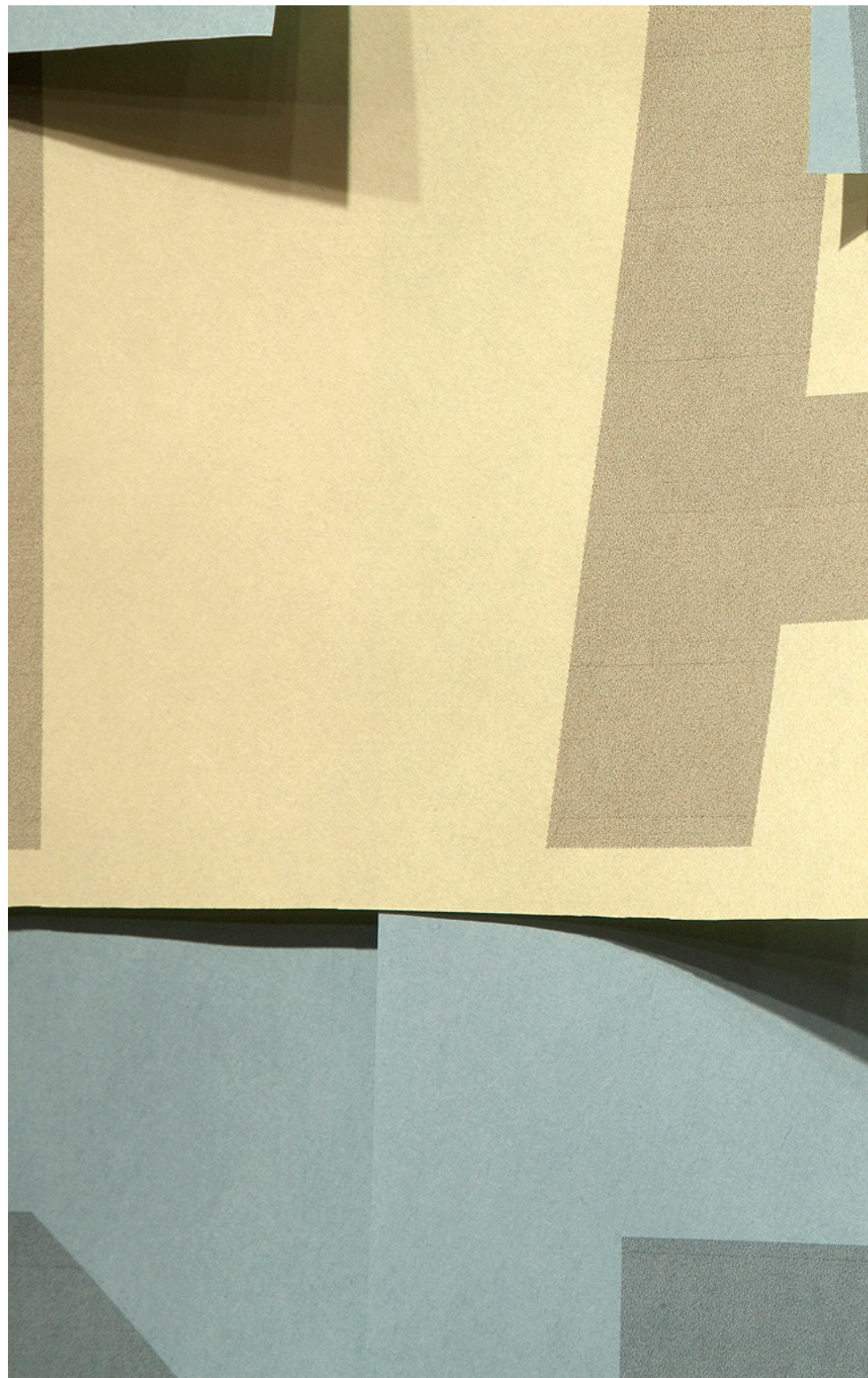
THE WORK THAT WORK LEAVES UNDONE

Raymond Boisjoly

Forest City Gallery
May 11, 2012 - June 9, 2012

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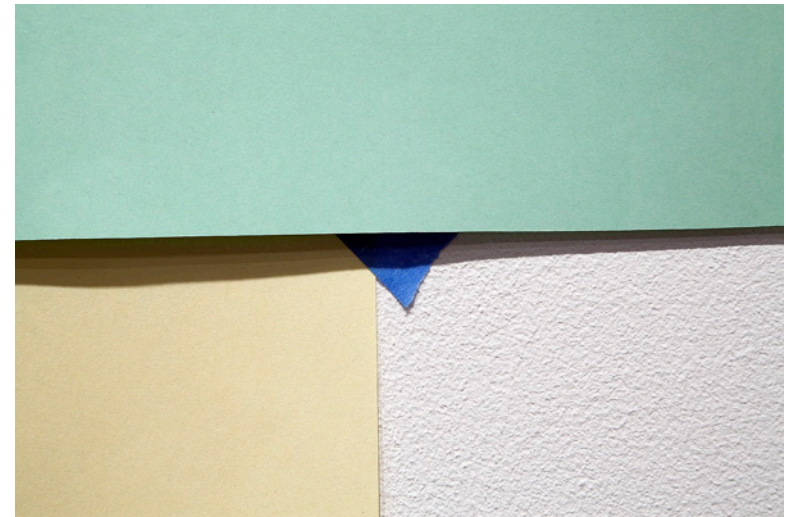
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Tape Fade Reveal

The works hang, taped sheets clinging tactilely to the wall. They are dialectical entities, made precarious through their constituent parts, which shunt us back and forth from wholes to fragments. A spectrum of tones, sheets fading in the light and fluttering in the breeze of its viewers – a shifting of space and position along with a subsequent gradation of colour and text. I find myself placed too much towards the ocular, a viewing that neglects the pitch of the work within itself. Repositioned, a reflection occurs on the terms of a gentle insistence. *The Work That Leaves Work Undone* presents a sway that contests the violence of increasingly common and decisive forms of action. There is an existence here that exerts without aggression. Boisjoly's print and tape works are implicit, considered, and mesmerizing gestures that render themselves in material form. These pieces can be understood as caught between practice and concept, a collided space of the static and ephemeral. Here, language is developing to take on a shifting and deeply personal character, one that balances and refracts the individual with the communal. Within this abstract multi-structured form, power is being folded in upon itself, assembling to reveal the potentiality of the act within.

– Colin Miner



“To Haunt All That Might Yet Come To Be”: Raymond Boisjoly’s Noises

By Henry Adam Svec

In 1948, the mathematician Claude Shannon publishes his influential theory of communication. Not concerned with particularly human problems, Shannon’s focus is technical, the communicative possibilities—communication here simply being the act of one machine touching another machine—of any given channel.

An important concept in the project is information, an often-reified resource: “Information is a good thing, the more the merrier.” Yet Shannon intervenes by defining information as a probability function—not a thing, but a constellation of potentialities, always delimited¹ by a channel. The more the merrier? Only if chaos makes for merriment (which is not impossible), because as information increases so does uncertainty. Entropy.

To discover what this isn’t, yet might have been, and what, at a decisive moment, it failed to become without ceasing to exist altogether. A selfless endeavor, because the virtual is always just a little before us, before our selves. (It’s all around.) How can we archive the properties that this lacks? Do we have the bandwidth? The Dewy Decimal System will not be sufficient (the only certainty).

Yet all channels, the living and the dead, are happily buried under their own unsent messages. Infinity envelops the receiver, which is often unable to scream. What my poor voice might sing into a telephone, for instance, is of no consequence to the materials that must work towards transmission; whether I am practically silent or whether I am a fire alarm, we’ll have transduction. The information² (in Shannon’s terminology) includes all the songs and stories, all the

quite unforeseeable bays and belches and bleeps, permitted to enter. No matter if they’re left unwritten for now—and there’s much my voice is unable to write.

In other words, the thing this is not is always already there. Boisjoly’s mere fictions, held up by colourful pages assorted like fish scales and taped to white walls, connected too to the digital media that made it all possible, expertly illuminate the principle. Immanent impossibilities wire together all channels³ through which, with a little patience, just about anything might force its way through (well, not impossible, according to Ernst Bloch, only Not-Yet). I am not Enrico Caruso, and was meant to be.

Still, from the point of view of the sender, the pure potentiality of an informational situation is never quite actualizable. In other words, machines break. Gaps, omissions, and fragments come to haunt all that might yet come to be shot through time or space.

Not everyone welcomes such disturbances. Shannon seeks to understand our channels’ capabilities, to command any and every medium, the enemy in this battle being noise—a byproduct of all transmissions. (For example, the slow curling of posted paper from the humidity in London, Ontario.) But the minimization of noise is a strictly mathematical procedure.

Warren Weaver tries to help Shannon along by translating his project for the general reader. Still, we must wonder what’s gone missing in Weaver’s supplementary essay. Don’t worry—it is always this way: LP grooves, cuneiform, autocorrected texts, radio waves, the Pyramids, tile printing. Like so many before him, the Raymond Boisjoly who tapes pages to the wall cannot be sure if he’s exactly in touch with the Raymond Boisjoly who composes texts with his computer’s keyboard, because material carriers force themselves onto the data they seem only to be sending out or preserving.

Kafka communicates to his beloved: “The ghosts won’t starve, but we will perish.” The ghosts won’t starve because messages tend

towards missing the mark, which is good for the ghosts, at least. Good for our writing, talking, touching machines, too, and we should think of them from time to time. Noisy machines make us nervous—we are afraid they'll be unfaithful—but their licentiousness can signal new horizons, as Michel Serres has made clear. Boisjoly's leafy sheets, the merrier, also feed on this.

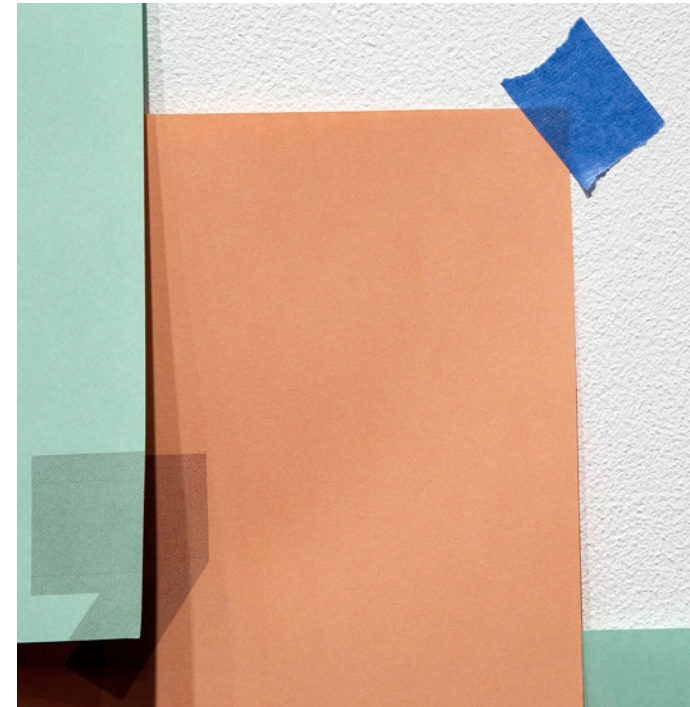
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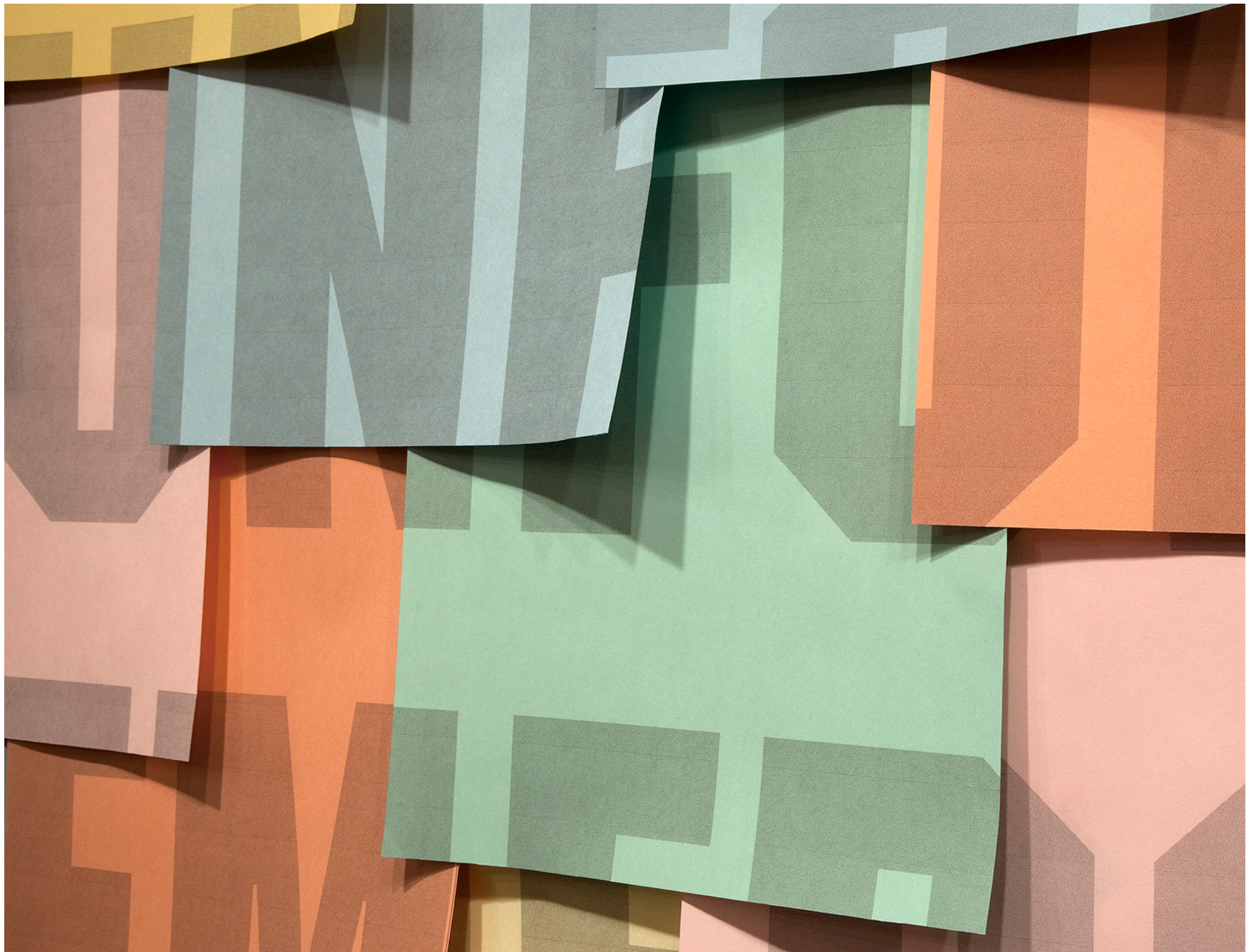
1. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1986.

2. Raymond Boisjoly. *The Work That Work Leaves Undone*. Forest City Gallery, London, Ontario.

3. Michel Serres. *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007.

4. Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver. *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1963.





I Stand In Front Of It And Ask Myself 'Why?'

On June 15, 2012 Moire's Ella Dawn McGeough conducted an interview with artist Raymond Boisjoly. Below is an edited version of their conversation in and out of space and time.

EDM: The transformation of conversation into text that occurs for a printed interview made me recall how on your website you added the word 'question' into your list of materials for the 2008 work, "Would you like to start again at the beginning?" What prompted your decision to materialize the immaterial in this way?

RB: The work was obviously not just the Christmas lights; it was a way to make the presence of text in the work, and as work, more explicit. I did it partially to amuse myself but it also seemed logical to include it.

EDM: It is interesting that this came to be within the digital and therefore immaterial medium of a website.

RB: That work was made almost 4 years ago so it was a way to give it some other life that it maybe didn't have before. It is nice to return to these things and think about them or find another way to frame, in

this case through a materials list.

EDM: Material lists are strange because they do not necessarily require honesty and yet are a declaration of truth at the same time.

RB: They are usually treated factually and yet they can be a place to have these suggestive inclusions. On the more recent work ["Rez Gas" 2012- and "The Writing Lesson" 2011-] I include sunlight as one of the materials since it is this tremendous source of energy that makes the work possible. They are premised on the actual action of sunlight on the paper. It would seem sort of silly to leave it out.

EDM: Through your inclusion of 'sunlight' or 'question', does the action of creating it become the material?

RB: I am not really thinking of it in this way. I am interested in the absence of an explicit narrative within a materials list.

Sunlight becomes a speculative presence within a list that otherwise includes conventionally nameable materials. There is a leap involved that seems odd but could potentially do a lot towards communicating an aspect of the work whose limited presence is both conceptual and real. By including them in the materials list it can create an ambiguous relationship to the project, where it is generative rather than didactic.

EDM: In your artist statement you write that you choose common materials for their ability to gesture towards other potential experiences. Would you like your work to speak to a double audience, one that is familiar with looking at contemporary art and able to see particularized meanings in your materials, and another that may be able to make associations outside of art's material discourse? Take your use of Christmas lights as an example.

RB: One thing I am consciously trying to avoid is the bracketing of these materials as they are used beyond an artistic context. Christmas lights are culturally full and the associations this material brings are central to the work. The lights have already been worked on; they contain an established

understanding amongst a larger public. There is an accessibility that does not necessarily require an alteration in thinking to understand these materials.

EDM: Is this notion also tied to your use of fluorescent or pastel paper for the three works included in your recent exhibit, *The work that work leaves undone*?

RB: I like how the paper is packaged and sold. Although in the most recent iteration I have added salmon coloured paper. The colours in these pre-packaged assortments of paper seem to belong together; they were put together as a set. For me it was interesting that it was a decision that I didn't have to make. It required a minimal intervention to come to those colours.

EDM: Do you think the idea of minimal intervention plays out in other areas of the work? For example, does the masking tape that held up the paper - and therefore the text - become the most minimal support structure possible?

RB: The convenience was important. It is a mechanism that works. It is cost effective. It has particular visual qualities.

Showing the support structure for the work becomes a way to show the contingency of the support structure. It is essential to the works functioning and I try to work through those contingencies. It becomes about the logistics of making something and foregrounding the provisionality of the materials. It is a low-tack tape; it is not the strongest tape I could have used.

The work can be activated in a way that I could never really anticipate. The materials demand a certain concern about the relative stability of the work. Although the work has never fallen off the wall, this is a very real possibility, a possibility I am not interested in excluding from the work itself. It is a straightforward way to produce a work that is still complicated but also accessible, engaging, and friendly.

EDM: Potential is a word you often use when discussing your work. Contained within it is a positive value judgment. We can think of the phrase, he has potential, although this can just as easily be rebutted by, potential for what?

RB: I am interested in both positive and negative potential.

These works in particular are held together with provisional materials so that it becomes possible for failure to occur. It becomes about realizing a particular potential but only to the extent that it does not foreclose the possibility of being undone and falling apart due to its own temporary character.

EDM: People seem to have an interesting emotional relationship to things that look like they might fail but don't. In other words, haphazard construction can induce the viewer to root for success.

RB: I see that as well. My interest in failure makes the relative potential for success more manageable. I think of it as an object with a nominal existence. It is not meant to be a consistent thing; rather it is a thing that will be taken off the wall and recycled. It is about thinking through what I can accomplish with a certain amount of effort. It is about a type of engagement that is determined by time. The aspect of dissolution is there in the work and I am concerned with how the work can encompass this possibility of collapse, which remains a concept to be imagined, even anticipated.

EDM: Is there a relationship to the divide between amateur and

professional? While I would not consider you an amateur by any means, you also don't seem to take on the role of the professional artist who would be upset by a less than perfect installation.

RB: The set up of this work is very complicated. I would never ask anyone to install this work for me if I was unable to install it myself. That is not because I am good at it; it is just because it is such a pain in the ass. It is not a specialized skill and although it is important that it be made in this way, the importance does not lie in its difficulty. I suppose somebody else could do it but that is not really the point.

EDM: "Makeshift and Makeshift ii" contain the lines:

**the work that work leaves undone
will haunt all that might come to be**

The first line was the title for your exhibition at Forest City Gallery in London. This seems to be an important concept in your work. Do you believe that past work has the ability to haunt present and future work, and possibly vice versa?

RB: These works ["Makeshift and Makeshift I", "Makeshift and Makeshift ii", and "Makeshift

and Makeshift iii"] were initially concerned with the revival of Haida cultural practices in the mid-twentieth century, specifically artistic practice. Our current understanding of Haida art is potentially restricted by a 19th century conception of what Haida art was. The works in this exhibition are about contingency and about how work made in the present can come to inform work that will be made in the future. So decisions that I didn't make or wasn't able to make also inform works yet to be made. It becomes about causality and the contiguity of past, present and future. They are categories of lived time and there is a real connection between them that can become a speculative relationship, defined negatively by what they are not.

EDM: Contiguous time makes me think of ghosts; they come from the past but through immortality have a future potentiality to both haunt and become conjured.

RB: For various reasons they are things that never had the ability to emerge. This negative capacity and their inability to actually come into existence also produce specters, not of death but of contingency. For me it is important to pursue things with

good intentions and acknowledge my responsibility to assess what actually happens.

EDM: Do you think art has the potential to change the future?

RB: I am interested in a reflexive engagement with art in a way that doesn't assume it has absolute importance, but I am trying to be realistic about it. Art is singular though not exemplary. It is not a replacement or substitute for something out there; it is simply added to what is out there. It is alongside other things but I do not want it to distract from other forms of engagement.

I do not think it has a revolutionary capacity but even if it did it wouldn't be the artwork fulfilling that transformative role. Awareness amongst a concerned public that the artwork affords is revolutionary, not art itself. Art is something that still requires an agent, a person, to put thinking into action.

I am interested in the ability for art to affect the way people consider certain real world phenomena, like the relation between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. For example, how people understand Aboriginals

and their material practices. It is important to always make things that bear a speculative relationship to my identity and background but that are not purely illustrative. I want to unsettle certain ways of thinking, or to be able to generate new ideas that aren't just the work.

EDM: Does there become a type of ulterior presence created by the work?

RB: The artwork is not a substitute for other types of engagement. I stand in front of it and ask myself, why? I often can't come up with a satisfying answer so that becomes a good motivator to make something else. Nothing can have an all-encompassing effect but each project starts to work away at it and contribute to something that isn't just itself.

EDM: This project was initially developed during a residency in Banff. Did that very particular studio environment instigate this work's production?

RB: When that residency came about I didn't have a lot of money to buy materials. It was more a question of, 'I am going to Banff, what am I going to do there?' I knew there would be a computer and a printer in the studio for me

to use, so I decided to make works on paper. It was based on what was there. It was just trying to work through the materials that I had on hand. It was about convenience. Also, it was nice because when I went back home I could just recycle the work. It became a relief. It wasn't necessarily why I made the work but it became an incidental benefit of working in this way.

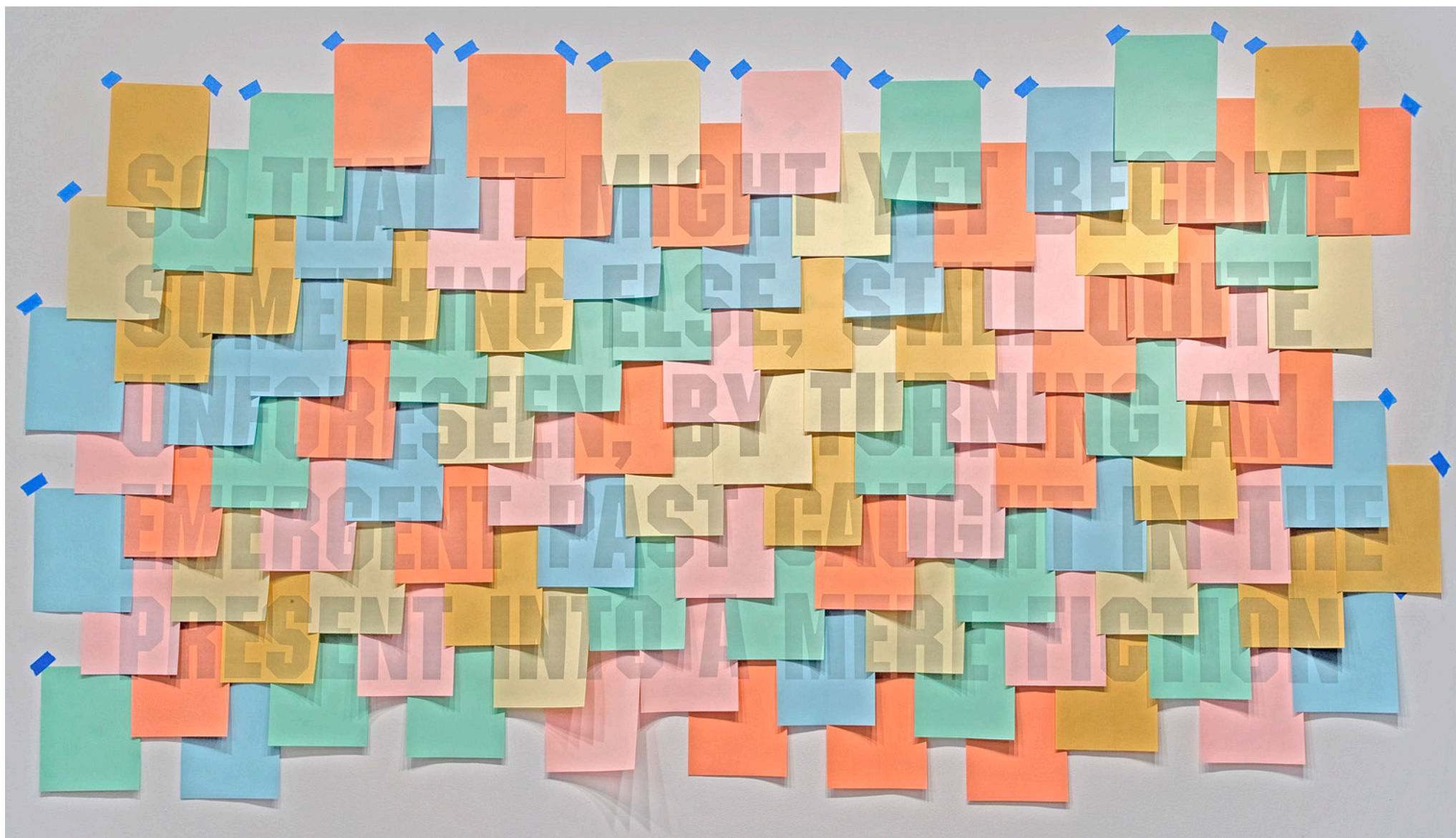
EDM: Did your practice shift after your MFA due to no longer having a permanent studio?

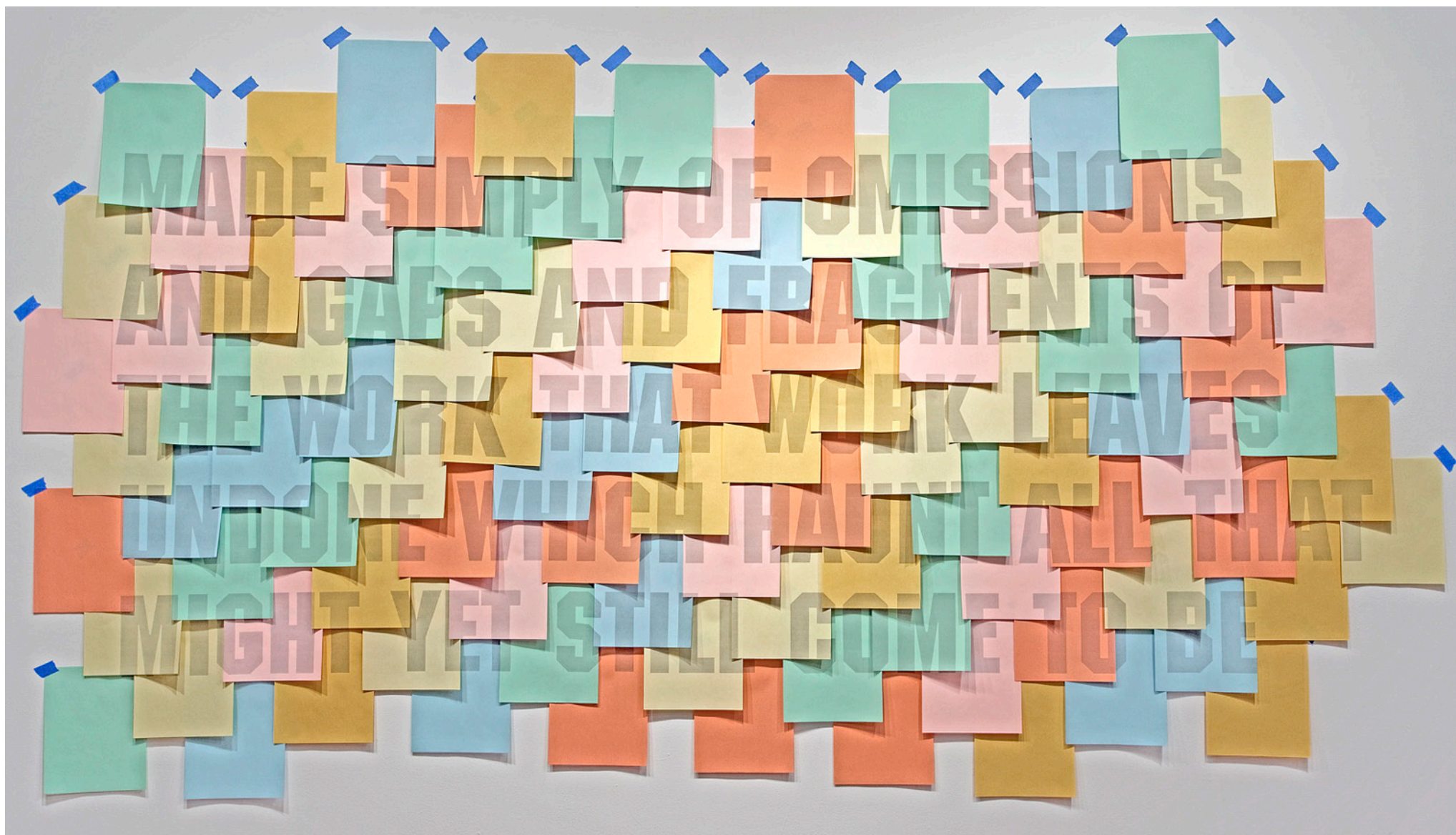
RB: Yes. My practice has changed by becoming engaged with more vernacular materials and imagery, for example my recent series of images of independent, Aboriginal-owned gas stations. This work is premised on the gas stations having an ostensibly Aboriginal character. I use the website www.rezgas.com to find them. When I go to these places I can get gas tax-free but they are often fascinating places where

I can encounter people in their own traditional territory without a cultural exchange in the usual sense. The challenge is thinking through the ordinariness of these gas stations. weird constellation of phenomena.

There are other factors that inform my interest in these places such as petroleum wars. It becomes this weird constellation of phenomena. Increasingly, my interest is taking something that seems relatively simple to engage in some larger discussion. They are not restricted to my own ethnic particularity but are about phenomena that suggest a shared or common experience. It becomes something that is accessible and that doesn't demand a specialized cultural awareness. I have been thinking of these gas stations as something common or familiar but also Aboriginal. It is not encountering a work by a certain person or nation in an art gallery; it is simply being out there.







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Makeshift and Makeshift i (To discover what this isn't, yet might have been, and what, at a decisive moment, it failed to become without ceasing to exist altogether), 2010-2012

inkjet prints and painter's tape

each approx 9 x 5'

courtesy of the artist

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Makeshift and Makeshift ii (So that it might yet become something else, still quite unforeseen, by turning an emergent past caught in the present into a mere fiction), 2010-2012

inkjet prints and painter's tape

each approx 9 x 5'

courtesy of the artist

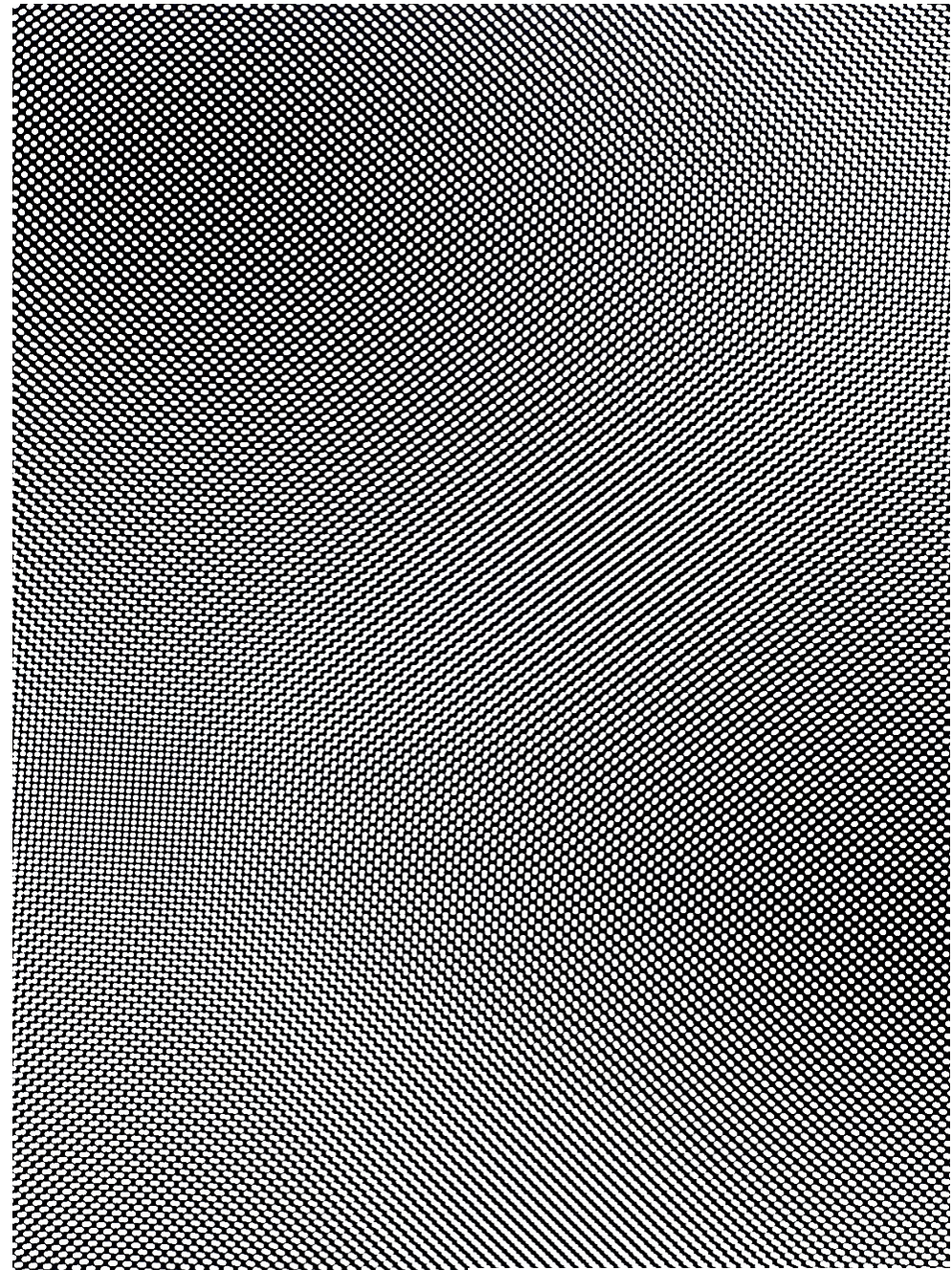
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Makeshift and Makeshift iii (Made simply of omissions and gaps and fragments of the work that work leaves undone which haunt all that might yet still come to be), 2010-2012

inkjet prints and painter's tape

each approx 9 x 5'

courtesy of the artist



Moire

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