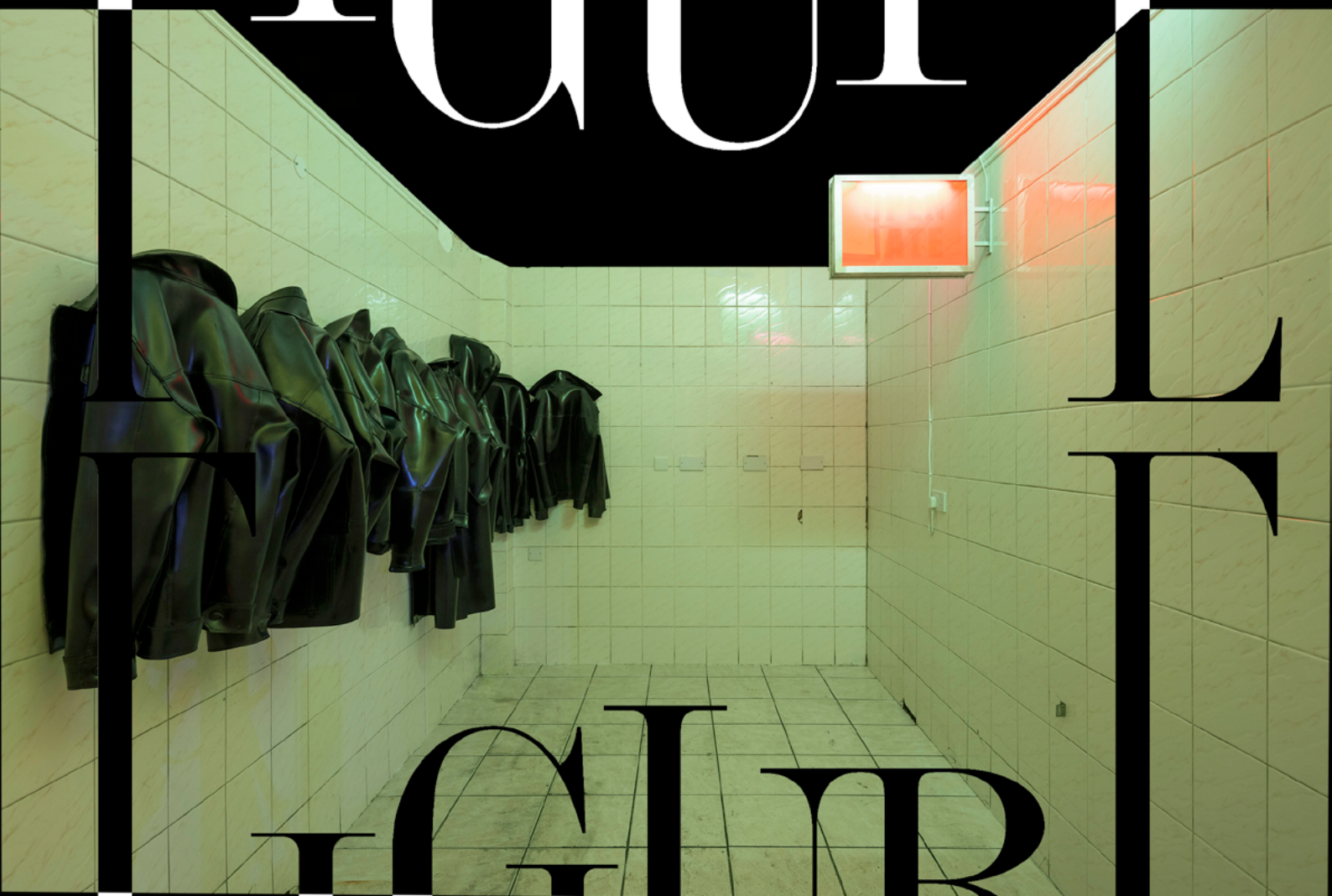


FIGURE



FIGURE

conversation with **EVA GOLD**
APRIL 2023

N° 54



A changed man (The Perv), Vulcanised rubber, gaffe tape, steel, bolts, 2019.
Photographer: Andy Keate.

SANDY YU *in conversation with*
EVA GOLD

- SY** Could you describe your practice and its evolution?
- EG** As a whole, my practice is a process of storytelling. Sometimes this can be quite open ended, with ideas drawn across different works through different spaces, in a kind of evolving narrative. My solo shows tend to be more contained in terms of the narrative framework. I work with sculpture and installation a lot, often using the inherent features of a place, like the lighting, smell, or the kind of atmosphere that a space might possess.
- SY** Does that mean you usually know where you will be presenting before you start working on something?
- EG** Not always, but I generally prefer to. If it is a solo show then I need to have a good understanding of the space, and to be excited by it in some way. I will know whether I want to do a show or not



“Slow Dance”, Installation view at Eigen+Art Lab, Berlin.
Photographer: Peter Oliver Wolff.



The dog house, Rubber roofing membrane, lead, 43 × 70 × 45 cm, 2022.
Photographer: Theo Christelis.

based on the space.

As far as my practice goes, I have always worked with sculpture. When I was on my foundation course, I had to pick which pathway I wanted to go into. I remember picking mixed media, but I did not get it. I was disappointed, but the sculpture teacher told me, “Well, this is because you are a sculptor. You have to be in this group.” I was not too thrilled initially, but then I realised that he was actually right. It made sense after a while.

I added different media to my practice over the years, such as text. Writing became quite important during my time at the Royal Academy. I started bringing it into my sculptural practice, initially as something to be read alongside other works, and then very directly within an installation. In my degree show I included some scenes as printed sheets of paper stapled to the wall. I was working with narrative, so it felt important to include writing, because you can be so direct in a way that sculpture is never going to be. Sculpture can tell a story, but it is always going to be kind of loose in comparison. I shied away from presenting my writing in this way for quite a while, because I did not want it to feel too didactic. The nature of my writing also tends to be quite vulnerable, so I was not sure how to approach that without it feeling cringy. But actually, when I did start to experiment with it, it freed up space for my sculptural language to evolve without needing to do the work of the writing.

SY Did you feel like it was cringy because you have seen other textual works, which felt that way?

EG Not specifically, but you might be right. I think it was actually because I had not really encountered that type of writing inside of art



People from last night's dreams stumble in dark rooms,
Rubber, buckles, 2022. Photographer: Mark Blower.

spaces. I had seen writing that was more distanced, or tongue—in—cheek, or a sort of post-ironic social critique type of voice, but not really narrative. I think there is also a bit of condescension towards narrative within the art world sometimes, although it does feel like there is more space for people to allow themselves to be vulnerable in their practice now, versus ten years ago.

I think also I had not really seen anybody working in that way, putting writing and sculptures in such close contact, or in that kind of writing anyway. I had some sort of aversion to it because of that, or it felt daunting. But if something seems daunting, it is usually always worth doing.

SY Do you foresee your text works replacing exhibition texts in that regard? Or do you ever have exhibition texts parallel to them?

EG This is something I am currently working around at the moment. I have not had a show yet where I have had a text of mine along with an exhibition text. I am not against it, and maybe at some point that will work, but it has not really seemed to make sense so far.

SY I guess they would be competing with each other, especially with the stylistic differences.

EG Yes, this could maybe be interesting, but I have not worked it out yet. Whenever I did a show where we commissioned a text, I always worked quite closely with the writer, even if the voice is not actually mine.

SY Do you take inspiration from your own life for your works?

EG A lot of what I make is informed by my own experiences, but I also take inspiration from stories people tell me about things that happen to them or things that they have heard about.



Some nights smell like trouble, Latex tubing, gold hoop earrings found on the floor of nightclub toilet cubicles, 72 × 20 × 10 cm, 2022.
Photographer: Theo Christelis.



Some nights smell like trouble, Latex tubing, gold hoop earrings found on the floor of nightclub toilet cubicles, 72 × 20 × 10 cm, 2022.
Photographer: Theo Christelis.

When I am writing it is usually a combination of truth and fiction. The process of writing also necessitates stepping away from reality. Even if I start from something that is real, it is useful to create a narrator who is not me. Although I think you do have to be very careful when speaking from another's experience, and I would always try to steer clear of speaking on behalf of another person.

With women especially, there is often an assumption that we can only draw from our own experiences, that it is always biographical, as if there is no capacity to think outside of our own reality. But actually, fiction can be a really useful tool to hide behind, it can make it easier to be vulnerable in other places. It is also freeing to remember that as a writer there is no obligation to be true to life.

SY Could you speak about your relationship to materials and immateriality?

EG All of the material choices I make are very deliberate. They have a history and references embedded within them. Beyond their physicality, I often want them to conjure something that is not necessarily present, sometimes through the smell, sometimes through their associations or where they have come from. I made a work called *Some nights smell like trouble* (2022), which is a coil of latex tubing but it has been pierced with five or six of these gold hoop earrings that I had found on the floor of different nightclub toilets. In that instance there is an actual history to the materials, but other times it is about the wider associations that come with a material, even if it is new. I work with rubber a lot, like for example the jackets in "The Last Cowboys" at Ginny on Frederick in London (2022). They are made of this heavy black rubber,



“The Last Cowboys”, Installation view at Ginny on Frederick in London, 2022.
Photographer: Stephen James.

which is a roofing material, and they smell very masculine, like tobacco and oil and sweat. I always want the materials to tell part of the story somehow, even if it is just evoking a memory or a feeling.

SY For the rubber used in *Cowboys*, for example, were you seeking something that specifically had that masculine smell you are describing?

EG I cannot remember where I first got it, but I had a small amount with which I made this sculpture *A changed man* (2019), which was in my degree show at the RA. It was very difficult to make the material do what I wanted to do, so the piece worked in some ways but failed in others. What I had not anticipated was the smell, which made me want to work with it more. So, I started to develop a way of working with the material where I could make it do what I wanted. For the jackets I had to really get to grips with pattern cutting. The weight and thickness of the material means that it has no drape, so it hangs in a very flat, stiff way. In order to make the form, the garments are constructed from about 30 or so panels each. Although I would say that sometimes there is no use battling with material to make it do something when it is just not going to work, other times you just have to sit with it for a while and find a solution. There are always practical reasons too. When I first started working with this rubber material, it was really cheap. I realised there are so many different grades of this material. I was working with the cheapest one. And then I discovered that it degrades, and it is not very good quality. Then, post—Brexit, it tripled in price, so now it is actually quite expensive.

SY That is really interesting, the economics of sculptural materials.

EG This is very hard material to work with anyway.





The whole work was a two—year undertaking. I used these two different sewing machines, which are 91 and 112 years old, and some of it was done by just hand and needle. I really had to force the material into submission, so to speak.

SY They are very detailed. Are they functional at all? Would you be able to wear them?

EG Yes, they are all functional, but the material is too stiff to move in. As I got better at making them, the more I could make pockets that actually work, and were not just there to look like pockets.

SY Are you also trying to evoke different materials using text, even with its lack of material?

EG I think maybe place would be more accurate than material. I am more interested in evoking feelings or using narrative as a way of exploring what it feels like to be in a particular body at a particular time, and the many ways in which that is complicated. When it comes to depicting the physical or material within my writing I try not to use excessive description. For me, in the context of sculpture or objects—whose materiality is present—then it is not necessary. This is something that I see writers do a lot, particularly in an art context, and it is not very engaging. When it is distilled down, and well placed, then I am here for it, but otherwise it can be a bit indulgent.

On the whole I try to keep my writing quite purposeful. I have been told that it is very direct, or even cold, which might be an extension of the way that I speak. I grew up in Manchester and people from up north are generally quite direct.

SY You have also started making drawings. Is that a recent thing?

EG It is really new. I have not really worked in a 2D way before. Actually, when I was studying at



Goldsmiths I was doing a lot of printmaking, but that was quite a different type of practice. What I do now is a lot slower. I work with coloured pencils which takes a really long time. The first one I did, *The Playground* (2022), I worked on sporadically over a two—year period. It was an image of a room in a club in Berlin, and it was drawn from memory, because you are not allowed to take photos. When I finished it, I realised that there was this space in my practice for me to incorporate images which I had not ever done before. I work from a lot of image references anyway. I have all these film stills that I have been collecting for years. In some ways they are already present in my work because they inform the broader visual language that accumulates across it all. But now I have started to draw directly from them. I am quite interested in the potential to take these images out of context and use them as part of another artwork.

SY In terms of your practice, what is sex and its relation to power? What is your bottom line when you explore these issues?

EG I think the relationship between sex and power is inextricable. But sexual dynamics and the surrounding politics are far more interesting to me than the act itself. Often, in my work this tends to manifest within the language of violence rather than erotics. But sometimes, the two are very closely bound.

SY So, what is important is not the sex in itself, but really what amalgamates around that?

EG Exactly. I think sex contains a lot of the ideas and feelings of our contemporary existence. Voyeurism, detachment, loneliness, vulnerability, desire, control or a lack of... These are all experiences that punctuate our lives and can produce a lot of tension. They play out within all



“Slow Dance”, Installation view at Eigen+Art Lab, Berlin.
Photographer: Peter Oliver Wolff.

kinds of interpersonal dynamics, but sexual politics are often an undercurrent.

SY You mentioned violence. Is this also something like an undercurrent?

EG Yes definitely. If we can use sex as a lens through which to understand the world around us, then I would say we live in very violent times. At one end of the scale you have these minute interactions which are happening all the time. For example, just a glance that somebody gives you on the street, it might last only for a few seconds and probably nobody else even notices, but there is a power dynamic there, and the potential for violence is very present.

But even if it amounts to nothing, that feeling does not exist in isolation. So, for me, it is more interesting to look at the way that these things intersect, with economics, social conditions, physical space... I think living in a city can be very hostile, London especially. So many people are working to the point of exhaustion, in order to survive in a city that does not seem to want you there anyway. When you have to close down parts of yourself just to keep going then at some point you just become a body. It is an extremely precarious existence, and I think incredibly violent too, even if you cannot stare the perpetrator in the face.

And then at the far end of the spectrum we have these very extreme events. I must get about three notifications a day about some murder or conviction or a body that has been found. This is just the stuff that gets reported on, and even that is warped by some political agenda. I think all these things trickle down in some way. There is a mood, I guess, some sort of threat or foreboding.

SY You said you are in dialogue with the world we live in, but you also mentioned that you take a lot of inspiration



“Slow Dance”, Installation view at Eigen+Art Lab, Berlin.
Photographer: Peter Oliver Wolff.



from films. Could you expand on that?

EG

Throughout my practice I am continually pulling from a constellation of images and memories that exists somewhere between the spaces of film and the spaces of reality. For me, the importance of cinema is the way in which it stretches out into our everyday reality. More than just being a kind of escapism, I think it actually has a reflexive relationship to our own experience of being in the world. It has fundamentally impacted the way in which people look at what is going on around them.

Going back to this idea of a constellation: there is a lot of repetition within mainstream cinema, lots of tropes—spaces, characters, lighting, emotions—that we are very familiar with even if we have not paid them specific attention. I think these form a sort of collective image base or memory that an audience knows, quite innately. I draw from this a lot, because I see it as a way of tapping into some shared consciousness or emotive capacity.

I do sometimes reference specific films in my work too. I made a large sculptural work as part of my Royal Academy show where I recreated a part of the set from the body horror/sci-fi film *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1983)—a wall containing 300kg of wet terracotta clay, marked with the impact of my body. My recent show “Slow Dance” at Eigen + Art Lab, Berlin included a drawing of a still from the erotic thriller *Body Double* (Brian De Palma, 1984). When I do reference specific films, it is as much about re-contextualising a single image or object, as it is about making a connection to the original work. Those things should work side by side, because you cannot ever take for granted that an audience has seen a specific film and



Backdrop for a porn channel (after Videodrome), Wet clay, 2019.
Photographer: Andy Keate.

understanding the work should not hinge only on that. Maybe if you have seen the film in question, then it gives the work another layer. But equally, maybe someone who has seen a film that is being referenced does not even realise it.

I think the more important thing is actually the assemblage of all the films we have ever seen, and their accumulation in our collective subconscious. This seeps into our lived reality, because it works as a touchstone to validate or authenticate our real-life experiences. It becomes a point of reference that is always more momentous or consequential. I think at some point or other we have all internalised that voyeuristic gaze of the camera and looked at a situation as if from the outside. It gives a kind of weight.

SY Which is quite paradoxical, because the film is the fake thing, yet it adds weight to reality. Besides film, do you have any other inspirations, perhaps from literature or theory?

EG There are so many. In terms of literature, I love Raymond Carver's short stories, and the writing of David Wojnarowicz. And for theory Baudrillard is a big one. His writing on Simulacra and the Hyperreal is quite relevant to the way I think about film and reality. I read his book *America* (1986) quite a long time ago, and the experience of place mediated by external images or cinematic memory, that really stayed with me. I think I read it around the same time that I first saw the film *Paris, Texas* (Wim Wenders, 1984), which is my favourite film ever, and the two are very connected in my head.

At the moment I am reading a book called *The Cinematic Society*, by Norman K Denzin, which looks at the formation and development of



The hand that feeds you, Lambskin leather, stainless steel, embroidery thread, 2022. Photographer: Peter Oliver Wolff.

cinema and the ways that it has contributed to the rise of voyeurism throughout society. It references Foucault, to argue that the cinematic gaze is part of the machinery of surveillance and power, which is used to regulate social behaviour.

There is also this book I have been coming back to a lot over the last year or two called *What We Don't Talk About: Sex, Authority and the Mess of Life* (JoAnn Wypijewski, 2021). It is a collection of essays that looks at different media scandals from the last 30 years. She unpacks all these layers of intersecting power: class, race, bodies, economics, social situations... talking about how the media reports these things in a very clear-cut way, which informs the way public opinion is developed. Her argument is basically that the press has a long-term conservative agenda, a sort of moral panic surrounding sex, and through oversimplification they are able to maintain this clearly delineated victim and perpetrator dichotomy. I find her approach really interesting, the way she scrutinizes the grey areas.

SY When you make work, do you have a specific outcome that you want from audiences? Or some sort of effect you want to induce? For example, do you have the intention of implicating viewers with an almost voyeuristic exchange?

EG Definitely. I think a big part of that is about leaving space for the viewer, so that they have to fill in the gaps to some extent, and in doing so they have to draw on their own knowledge of something that is potentially quite private, or dark. Sometimes it is about making someone feel uncomfortable with their own assumptions or position.

Throughout my work I am always trying to make the audience to feel something, to get



Lazy boy (The Perv) and Backdrop for a porn channel (after Videodrome),
Vulcanised rubber, gaffer tape, silicone, latex, automotive grease,
vaseline, La-Z-Boy, Wet Clay, 2019. Photographer: Andy Keate. **28**



Lazy boy (The Perv), Vulcanised rubber, gaffer tape, silicone, latex, automotive grease, vaseline, La-Z-Boy, 2019. Photographer: Andy Keate.

across some affect or to trigger something. It can be a personal memory or something shared, but my hope is that it is something that lingers.

SY Going back to Baudrillard, do you try to present your work as a second viewing?

EG If you mean a sort of *déjà vu*, then yes, that definitely resonates with what I am trying to do. I think there is a quite fine line between reproducing something very ubiquitous versus teasing at the edge of something that you already have a sense of knowing. I guess the difference is how readily available the moment of recollection is. Which can come down to whether you represent something directly or not. My aim is for the work to do the latter, to hopefully give the sense that this is something that you already know.

SY There is a lot of euphemistic tension and sexual charge in your works, but very rarely is there a body present. Could you speak about this absence?

EG For me, the suggestion of bodies takes place through the use of objects, such as furniture and garments. In *Cowboys* (2022) a row of coats can resemble a line of men with their back turned, while also suggesting a cloakroom or liminal space between the outside and inside. It is more interesting that it can do both those things. In the chair works there are bodies too; a chair has arms and legs and a back. Depending on how an object is installed it can also have a gaze, and even a subject. When I made *Lazy boy (The Perv)* (2019) I was looking for something very specific, and I really loved that this particular model of the chair has these cushioned arms that were like huge biceps. The physicality of the object, the way that it takes up space, slouching back and staring forward, silently watching, consuming—for me those suggestions were very charged and very deliberate.



Perv City, 4 channel video installation, 2020.
Photographer: Corey Bartle Sanderson.



Home Video, Jesmonite, rubber, 18 × 8,5 × 21 cm, 2023.
Photographer: Theo Christelis.

SY I guess if there is a body, then people would not be able to place their own bodies in the given scenario. I suppose it makes it a little more open-ended and more relatable in a way.

EG Again, it becomes reductive to represent something directly. I am more interested in how these absent bodies can be imbued with their own personhood, as characters within a wider narrative or scenario. If I were to sculpt a physical body I think it would perform very differently.

SY And what of the body's relation to sexuality?

EG It is always suggestive. If I am not representing a physical body directly then the objects have to do the work to enact this. And if I am broadly understanding sexuality within the framework of power, then it is about object relations. So, I am asking an object to impose itself on the viewer, or to submit.

It goes back to materials decisions too, like we were talking about earlier—the associations with a particular object or material, where it comes from and what can be evoked by a certain time and place. For example, there is a sculpture that I am working on at the moment, which is a folding chair from the '70s. It is very seedy and I think quite disgusting, but also kind of hot, and it is that in-between quality that is the most intriguing to me.

SY How did you create this particular work?

EG I bought the chair and I stripped it back, taking it apart and removing the existing cover. Then I used these lamb skins, which have been oiled and are a dirty tan sort of colour—again very specific—and re-upholstered the chair using them, in a woven pattern.

There is also this camcorder, titled *Home Video* (2023), which for me is the perviest camcorder you could possibly find. It feels like it



Hotel, Latex, aluminium, fluorescent strip light, gel, 2022.
Photographer: Peter Oliver Wolff.



Motel, Latex, aluminium, fluorescent strip light, gel, 2022.
Photographer: Peter Oliver Wolff.

could belong to somebody in the background of a really dated porn video. As an object it becomes really charged with this subject/object relation, with one person behind the camera and another in front. I guess you could say the same about all cameras, but there is something about this particular model, which really hits the nail on the head.

My intention is that with this intensely voyeuristic object, you put yourself in the frame somehow, which maybe gives you a dirty feeling. It is the same with the lighting, which conjures a certain type of space.

SY Can you expand a bit on the ways that you work with lighting, and its relation to atmosphere? Do you control the lighting in your exhibitions?

EG As much as I can. For my last show, “Slow Dance”, I took out most of the fluorescent strip lights, and with the remaining bulbs I used a gel that takes the light down about six stops. It made the space very dim and gave a low hazy quality to the light. At the opening everybody was speaking really quietly, I think because of the lighting, which was quite unexpected.

SY Was this the only light source?

EG No, there were several sculptural works that were also light sources. *Hotel* (2022) and *Motel* (2022) are canopies, like those that you see above the doors of newsagents or corner shops in the UK, or some hotels in New York. They were made out of latex, stretched very taut, and were lit from inside with warm light, the kind that would welcome somebody in.

I worked a lot with the lighting in “The Last Cowboys” too. I wanted to have a two-tone reflection on the jackets, so I made these two works *Residual Heat (24 Hour)* and *Residual Heat (Open Late)*. The show was in spring, so



“The Last Cowboys”, Installation view at Ginny on Frederick in London, 2022.
Photographer: Stephen James.



Residual Heat (24 Hour), Aluminium, Perspex, fluorescent strip, gel, duck feathers, 2022. Photographer: Stephen James.

during the opening it got dark, and the colour from the light works filled the room with a green—yellow light. The colour itself is one I had been trying to make for a few years. It is used a lot in cinema, in depictions of the city at night, particularly in the neo—noir genre. Gaspar Noe uses this kind of lighting a lot, and Wong Kar-Wai. The neon—lit streets in Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* is a similar kind of effect, but for exterior shots. We had the light works on in the gallery all night, so anybody passing by the space after hours saw it lit up, green light on the tiles.

SY

And what are you working on next?

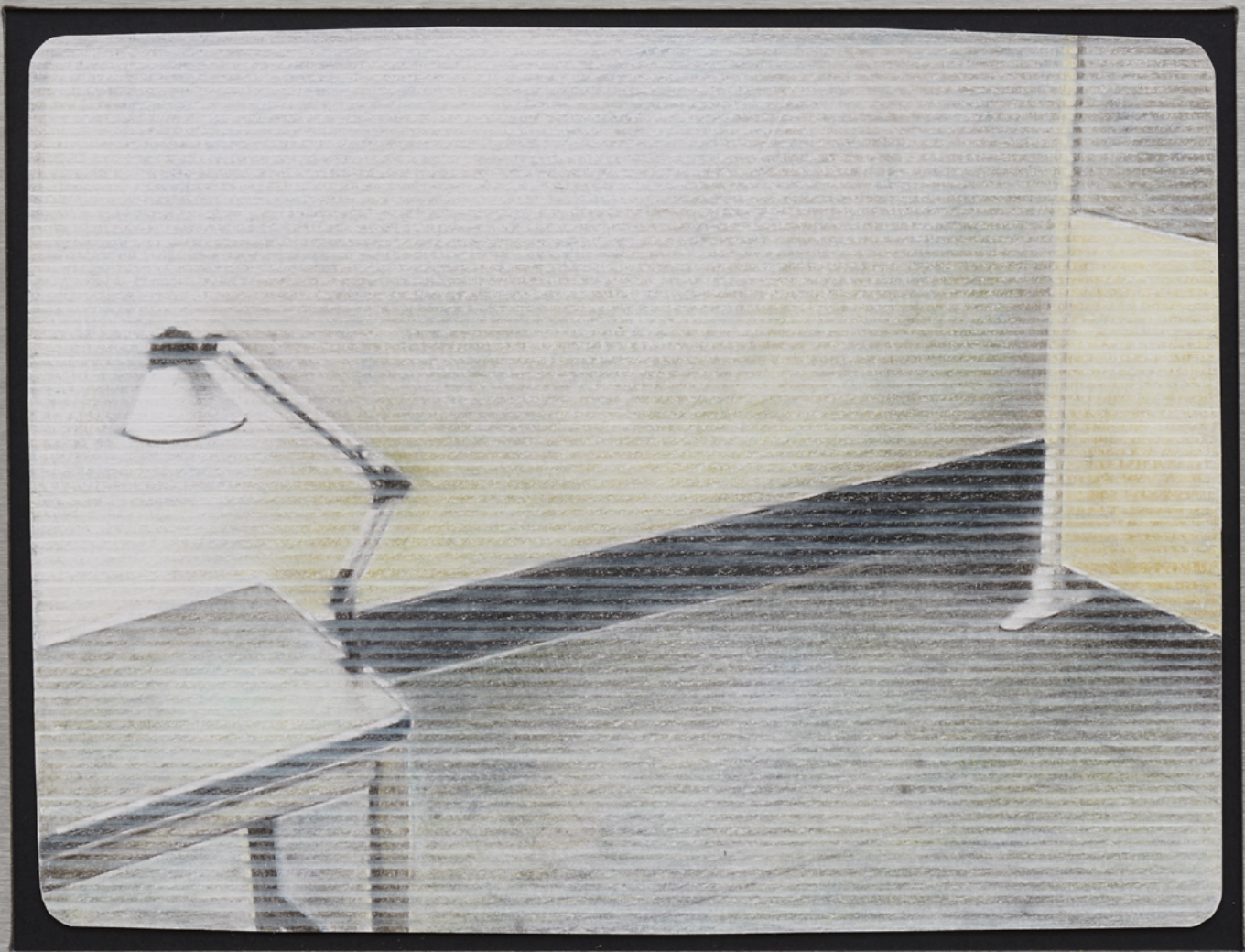
EG

I have been doing a lot of drawing recently, working on these two small pieces which are of a surveillance video still, showing an interrogation room. They are taken from the film *Cure* (1997), which is a Japanese horror directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa. I have been gathering a lot of stills where there are films within films, so that is sort of where my interest in it lies.

I am going to be showing those drawings, and some new sculptures, in a show I have coming up in March: *City of Rooms*. It is actually two shows, because it is split across two spaces, but both parts are connected. The first one opens at Rose Easton and will be a presentation of works by myself and Louise Bourgeois. The second part is at The Shop at Sadie Coles HQ, and will be a solo presentation.



00:06:03, Coloured pencil on paper, steel and aluminium frame, 25 × 29 × 3 cm, 2023
Photographer: Theo Christelis..



00:10:22, Coloured pencil on paper, steel and aluminium frame, 25 × 29 × 3 cm, 2023
Photographer: Theo Christelis.

Eva Gold, Figure Figure 2023
Courtesy of the artist

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