

INTERVIEW

Brittni Ann Harvey and Harry Gould Harvey IV by Jack Radley

Art as a social ecology.

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Brittni Ann Harvey, *Lamb of God (Bowing Robot Dog)*, 2021, embroidered polyester, plywood, polyfill, bronze, 19.75 x 41.5 x 23.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Someday, New York City.

Venerable artists who double as crackerjack museum directors, Brittni Ann Harvey and Harry Gould Harvey IV somehow haven't compromised in either realm. The two continue to mine the Massachusetts South Coast's industrial histories in both their solo practices and [Fall River Museum of Contemporary Art \(FR MoCA\)](#), the institution they cofounded. Over the last four years, FR MoCA has established a program that could hold its weight in any city but imprints heavily on home turf.

I visited Brittni and Harry to talk about their [two-person show](#) at the MIT List Visual Arts Center. Over the course of the day, we talked over sketches in their studios, blue tape at FR MoCA, and \$5 Chouriço sandwiches at Portugalia, a marketplace down the street that rivals anywhere in the Azores.

Jack Radley

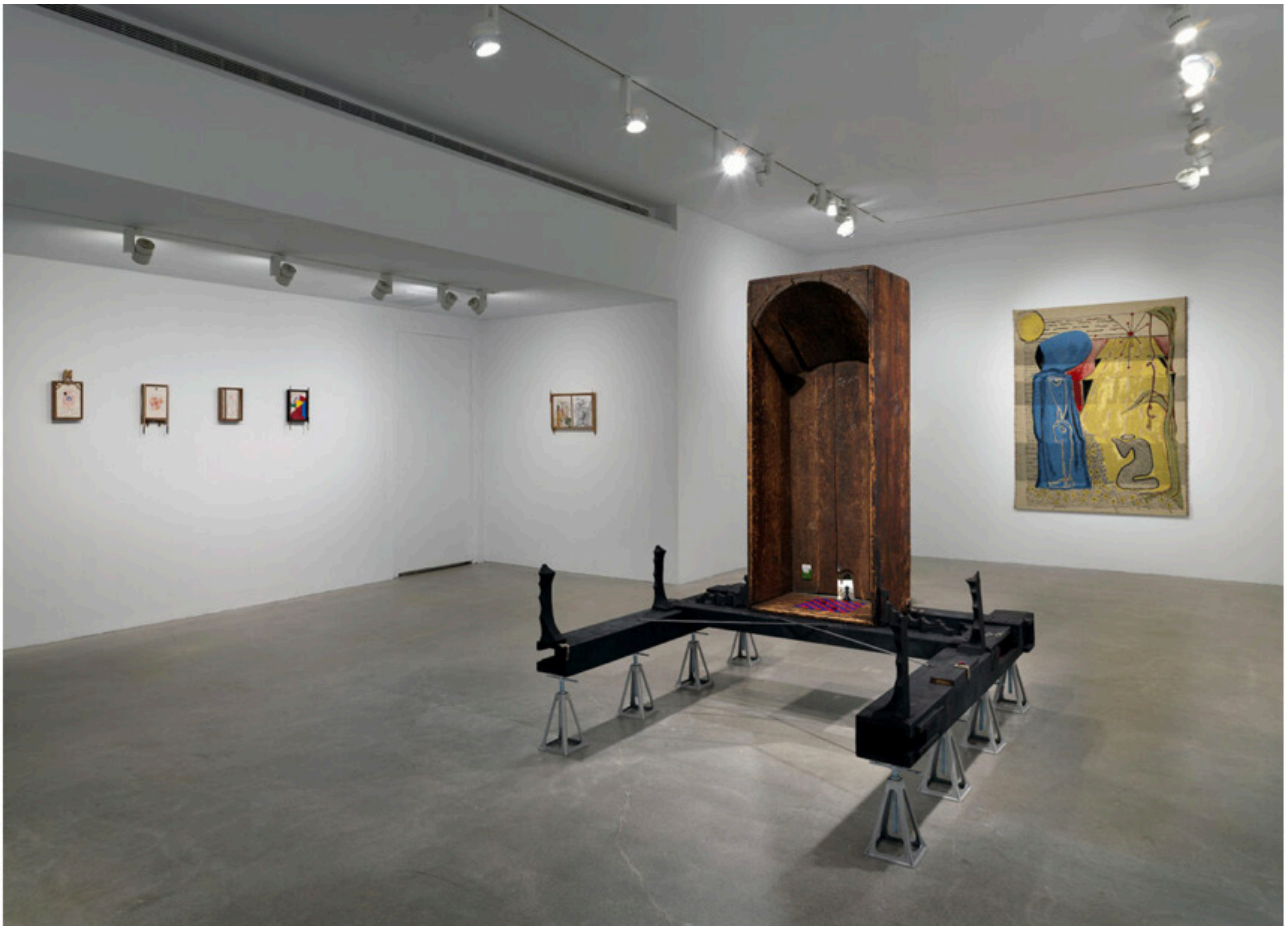
How did your two-person exhibition at the List come about?

Brittni Ann Harvey

Assistant Curator Selby Nimrod invited us into this whole season around artistic collaboration. We're each showing previous works and new works, as well as a collaborative piece.

Harry Gould Harvey IV

The bathtub in the collaborative sculpture has a lot to do with the fact that I'm always in the bath as a healing practice, and we've both been interested in the Mother Mary in sculptural space. It's often an Azorean Portuguese American phenomenon, where there's a clawfoot tub buried in the front lawn with a Mother Mary in the tub. This vertical wooden structure is an old bathtub that used to be lined with copper to make it watertight. Brittni also really connected to how the bathtub feels in a way like a manger. The wood is of an old-growth evergreen tree, aged by time.



Installation view of *List Projects 29: Brittni Ann Harvey & Harry Gould Harvey IV*, 2024. MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Photo by Dario Lasagni. Courtesy of MIT List Visual Arts Center.

JR

Where did you get the bathtub?

HGH

We bought it from somebody locally, who used to use it as a firewood storage bin. It's probably from around the 1890s. I find it to be a really formally intriguing object because it has the drain spouts still drilled out, which makes me think about Marcel Duchamp and the readymade. The main form is constructed via misusing materials with their own historic origins and provenance. These deconstructed organ pipes once billowed church songs with ecclesiastical energies.

BAH

There's maybe a rudimentary reference toward a catamaran structure with the base. There are also structures similar to those you'll see in boatyards, holding up ships, supporting the base of a trailer—a temporary stabilizing of a nomadic structure. The value has really seemed to be observing what is birthed from our practices working together. We've done collaborative shows in the past but never collaborative work. I often work in softer forms with textiles and have done a lot of metalworking and bronze casting. Harry's process of sourcing materials is also at play.

JR

Has the context of the museum influenced what you've decided to show?

BAH

I'm showing a couple of my *Robot Dogs* (2021–). When I was working with the Navy as a contract negotiator, some of my engineering colleagues were MIT graduates who related to this robotics field around Boston. My sculptures are loosely based off of the Boston Dynamics robot dogs, which are bright yellow dogs that market robots as more approachable. I'm fascinated by this domestic animal being personified as the intro point to accepting robotics in everyday life.



Harry Gould Harvey IV, *Presupposition of Saint Anne*, 2023, colored pencil, charcoal, xerox, White Oak from Prudence Island, 19.5 × 16 × 2.25 inches. Courtesy of the artist and KADIST Collection.

JR

I'm also thinking about MIT as a school. I know you're both educators.

HGH

Yeah, we're teaching an Art as Social Practice course at Durfee High School as college-credited professors from UMass Dartmouth.

JR

I suspect this is the first time social practice has been taught there. What does the class look like?

HGH

We give them a little bit of a background on institutions. We're riffing off FR MoCA as our

social practice, introducing them to structures and the ability to be critical within those structures. The challenge of our class is helping them realize that they have autonomous thought. We bring in some other students, like Isaiah Raines, who was in our last FR MoCA exhibition. The students like talking to him; he graduated from the same school they are currently enrolled in. He's an important artist from Fall River who has been working at the Rhode Island School of Design. It's collaborations with artists like Isaiah that become the impetus for FR MoCA to exist.

The goal for this semester is based around the native pollinator gardens that we're working to implement at FR MoCA. We're accessing a plot of city farmland to make a pollinator garden with our students and having them help design and plant this garden, as well as come up with ideas for programming. The students can observe the process of seeds becoming plants and going back to seeds. It's trying to steer the students' attention toward understanding our responsibility as organisms within an ecology and a social ecology.

JR

You're reframing ecology as participatory as opposed to passive.

BAH

Our students can feel out of control of so many things in their lives, but we want to give them a little sense that they can do something toward creating the realities that they hope to see. It doesn't have to stop with what we inherit; there is inevitably change and adaptation that will need to be spearheaded.



Installation view of *Brittni Ann Harvey and Harry Gould Harvey IV: Plant/ED: Drawing from Observation*, 2024. Fall River, Massachusetts. Courtesy of the Fall River Museum of Contemporary Art.

JR

Are there works in the recent [*Plant/ED: Drawing from Observation*](#) exhibition at FR MoCA that form this kind of social classroom?

HGH

Do you know Peter Fend? He was staying with us for five days. He's a seventy-four-year-old conceptual artist. He's always working on art, but he's also really big about doing "real work," which means moving beyond the stage of presenting ideas within artworks and into actionable potential contracts for execution. His whole artwork in our show at FR MoCA is basically a proposal that he wants some local government to fund. It's a proposal toward implementing a certain approach to how we're navigating our resources here in Fall River specifically. He worked with Jenny Holzer and Richard Prince to create a corporation that was a group of artists called Ocean Earth. That's really interesting to me, especially because we have a nonprofit corporation, and it's based in art and aesthetics, but we really do much more on the ground.

The groundwork is in the classroom but also just holding space for the public and for dialogue in a nonhierarchical, rhizomatic way. To have the corporation is helpful because it allows others to support the work we do directly. The art world is intrinsically tied to wealth management, taxes, and bureaucracy; when engaging with sociologically critical projects with FR MoCA, we can address some of these issues a little more collectively. To be a legitimate corporation that the government can actually contract with to do research and be consulting on different topics is what Peter and these other artists kind of spearheaded, and I want to see more artists in these positions.

"The artist's viewpoint is not invalidated with us like it often is in the silo of a technological, bureaucratic realm."

— Brittni Ann Harvey

BAH

I feel like if you're in the art world, what Peter wants to do sounds kind of unobtainable or out of place for him to propose; but because I've worked within the defense realm, and because Harry is so knowledgeable with ecological systems, we're like, Oh, yeah, we could do that. The artist's viewpoint is not invalidated with us like it often is in the silo of a technological, bureaucratic realm.

JR

How did Peter's work relate to others in the show?

HGH

The show consisted of multiple examples of drawing. We introduced Peter's work to our students as an example of how you don't have to have something as formally resolved as a technical engineer's drawing to convey valuable meaning. We also showed examples of differences in career paths utilizing drawing: for example, Kendall Rivera-Lane, who works at Rhode Island Hospital making medical drawings and being within the physical space of the medical system, or Duncan Laurie navigating the body as part of nature with radionic systems used for healing purposes. Faith Wilding makes these drawings that are a kind of reconciliation and a meditative experience with trees and leaves and nature. A lot of the work has to do with the glow around or the labor done relative to observing the nature of things. There's not something too far off between the way that Parker Ito works as a conceptual artist in the post-internet era and the way that Peter works. The aesthetics are radically different, but they're both grappling with, like, onto-political issues, social change, psychological images, how memory works, and how cultures are observed through their unique reality tunnels.

JR

And it's about observation within the ecology of Fall River, which you've achieved by inviting many of the artists to come live with you for some days and observe in the region.

BAH

It's a unique experience because we're not really museum operators. We're two artists that really like working collaboratively with other creative and catalyzed individuals. We approach it more like an experience, more open-ended.

List Projects 29: Brittani Ann Harvey and Harry Gould Harvey IV *is on view at MIT List Visual Arts Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, until June 23.*

Jack Radley is a writer and editor based in Brooklyn. He is co-founder of the independent curatorial project ACOMPI.