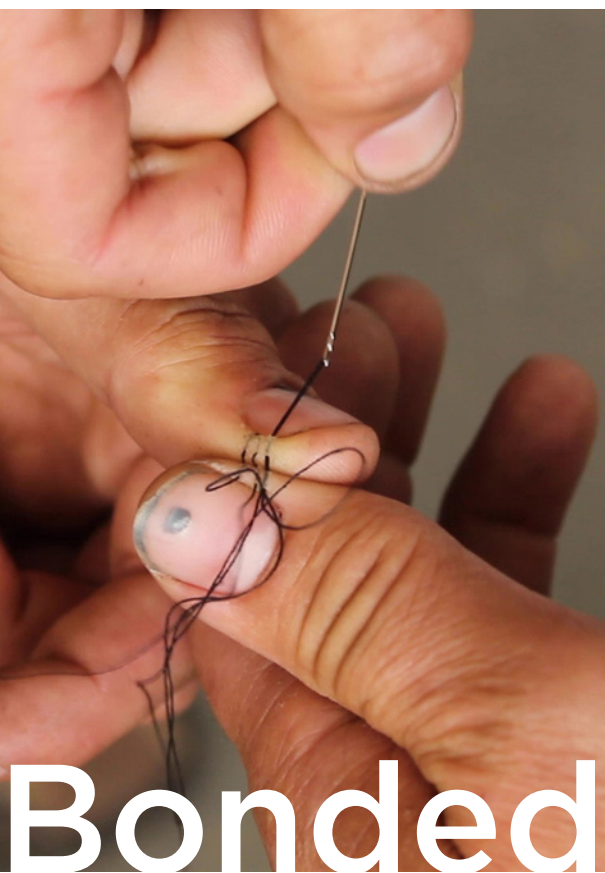


SEBURA&GARTELMANN



Bonded

Sebura&Gartelmann:  
*Bonded was held in  
the Imprint Gallery at  
the Madison Museum of  
Contemporary Art from  
June 6-September 27,  
2020. It was developed  
in partnership with the  
Art History course Design  
Thinking for Exhibits,  
at the University of  
Wisconsin-Madison.*

**SEBURA&GARTELMANN:**  
**Bonded**



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**“Male intimacy,  
friendship, and  
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*- Elizabeth Shoshany Anderson*

# Forward

by Elizabeth Shoshany Anderson,  
MMoCA Assistant Curator

Artwork featuring the body can be an arena for artists to push their physical limits—to treat the corporeal form as an experimental canvas with which to explore a central question. For Jonas Sebura and Alex Gartelmann, collectively known as Sebura&Gartelmann, the question addressed in their performance and video work concerns the limits of physical and emotional partnership.

The pair utilize their bodies, often in tandem, to struggle towards the completion of a difficult yet fruitless task; sewing their fingers together, scaling a wall using minimal equipment and verbal cues, or strenuously trying to crawl forward while bound to the same rope are some examples seen in *Bonded*. Sebura&Gartelmann work together or against each other in close quarters, embracing the slapstick absurdities of each situation while depending on physical connection to finish the job.

Though as viewers we can never share their connection, we are able to witness the artists test that bond through their arduous explorations. Male intimacy, friendship, and vulnerability are at the core of

Sebura&Gartelmann's work, and in this exhibition, we can witness the duo's inventive collaboration. The artists often laugh together during their labors, and through the strength of their cooperation, we are let in on the joke.

It has been MMoCA's pleasure to work with Professor Anna Campbell's Design Thinking for Exhibits course at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Students in the course have conceived of and implemented every aspect of this exhibition, including writing the insightful essay following this forward. The cross-institutional collaboration between the Art Department at UW-Madison and MMoCA seeks to develop the next generation of museum professionals by immersing them in the practice of curation.





**“Through acts  
that employ risk,  
danger, pain,  
silence, and humor  
Sebura&Gartelmann  
expose trust,  
vulnerability, and  
intimacy in their  
relationship and  
collaboration.”**

*- Andrea Oleniczak & Taylor Kurrle*

# A Laborer's Bond

*Catalog essay by: Andrea Oleniczak & Taylor Kurrle*

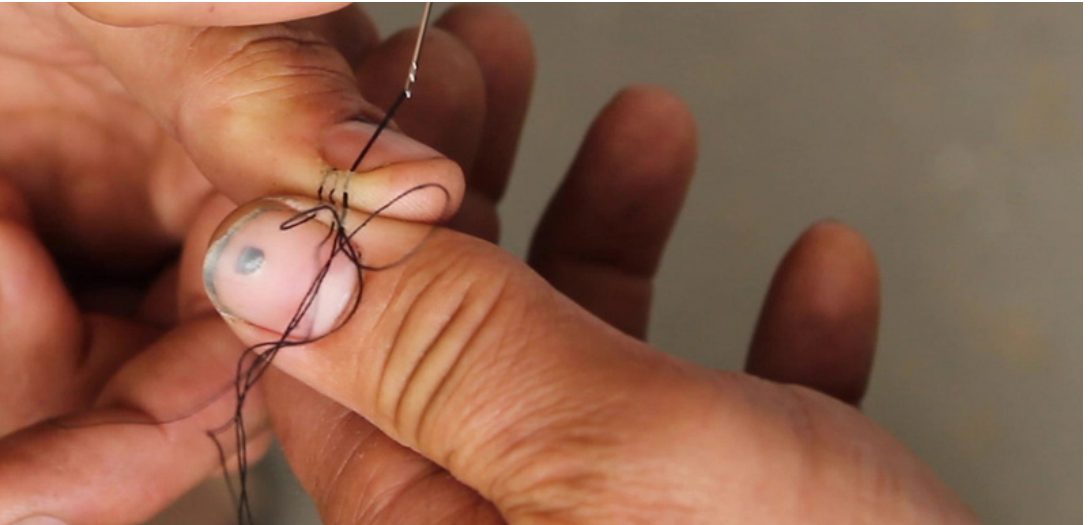
Sebura&Gartelmann are consciously bonded, psychologically and physically, through a practice that employs a shared use of tools, space, and subtle nuances of male relationships. Their relationship reveals subtle undertones of trust, vulnerability, and intimacy overlooked as core values of friendship between men. Insight in and through their bond finds form through mediums of video, photography, and physical objects.

*Sebura&Gartelmann: Bonded* marks a decade of shared practice and artistic collaboration for Jonas Sebura and Alex Gartelmann. Sebura&Gartelmann's relationship has weathered the tides of any personal relationship: juggling long distances and the competing obligations of their careers to carve time and space for their practice. Foundational bonds of this history stem from a middle-class, blue-collar upbringing expressed in their work through labor, subcultural references, and subtle cultural rebellion towards assumed norms in male relationships and male bonding.

At the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, graduate school was the stage for Sebura and Gartelmann's initial meeting. A shared background of skateboarding and alternative culture created what they describe as an instant connection. Not participating in the white-collar activities of youth left both Sebura and Gartelmann to find a supportive family in skateboarding crews. As they grew up, the family evolved into laborer crews.



Sebura&Gartelmann's work contains references to their shared laborer backgrounds using the tools and materials of construction sites. Conditions of their bond are revealed subtly through more blatant acts of danger, humor, and pain. The exhibition *Bonded* shows the human and culturally masculine connections that one would experience on the jobsite as well as evoking the kind of relationship and care that carries on after one punches out.



Sebura&Gartelmann, *Finger Sew*, 2019. Single-channel video with sound, 2:09 minutes. Courtesy of the artists.

*“The tools become the conduit, the iconography, of those subsets of traditional identifications of male culture, experiences, and roles.”*



Sebura&Gartelmann, *Peg Wall*, 2017. Four-channel video with sound, 8:28 minutes. Courtesy of the artists.

There is a transition with the work of Sebura&Gartelmann, where their academic understanding of an art practice elevates the language and lens of alternative youth culture and laborers' class. Their raw ability to express themselves through easily accessible materials and simple gestures elevates the experience of dirty and sometimes dangerous actions and inserts a level of care for the viewer to experience. The tools become the conduit, the iconography, of those subsets of traditional

identifications of male culture, experiences, and roles.

The exhibition *Sebura&Gartelmann: Bonded* showcases four videos that frame the theme of bonding, including *Peg Wall*, *Pulley System*, *Gum Chew*, and *Finger Sew*. Two central themes emerge when viewing these videos through a laborer's lens, on and off the job. *Peg Wall* and *Pulley System* are acts that reflect a collective effort towards a given task, similar to a day's work on a jobsite. The secondary theme reflects bonding in an off-the-job frame. *Gum Chew* and *Finger Sew* exhibit care and connection through a relationship and bond that stays with two people after a day's work.

In *Peg Wall*, Sebura and Gartelmann are on opposite sides of a tall vertical wall constructed from plywood sheets. The physical objective is to climb the wall simultaneously using only three wooden pegs that pierce through each side of the wall. Sebura&Gartelmann begin to collaboratively solve their next move while navigating a shared weight on

the pegs, and their individual needs to avoid falling. Their synchronized climbing becomes visibly more difficult as they inch closer to the top of the wall.

The task at hand in *Peg Wall* appears simple, to go up and down the wall. Three pegs and verbal communication are the only tools to accomplish this goal. The obstacle is similar to a task found on a jobsite, theatrically played out in manual labor and extended effort. The bond formed through *Peg Wall* is built on shared risk and the willingness to try.

Where *Peg Wall* is a collaborative effort, *Pulley System* is a competitive effort. There is a shared physical connection tethering their movement through a rope and pulley system attached to a wall behind them. Both Sebura and Gartelmann individually exhaust themselves with exerted effort moving away from the wall towards the camera. Their tethered relationship creates a condition where any personal forward gain achieved is at a loss to the other's position.





Sebura&Gartelmann, *Pulley System*, 2019. Single-channel video with sound, 2:21 minutes. Courtesy of the artists.

As Gartelmann makes progress toward the camera, Sebura shifts in relationship to his collaborator, resulting in significant setbacks, sliding back towards the wall. Visible bonding culminates through a balance of power, success, and failure. *Pulley System* is an ambitious effort, but there is no identifiable task at hand other than the tangible evidence of work as Sebura&Gartelmann begin to reveal exhausted energy and physical stress.

*Peg Wall* and *Pulley System* are a window into manual labor, where bonding finds form in a shared ritual. The videos end, but the acts are never adequately concluded. Similar to a laborer's work life, these tasks could be performed repetitively with equivalent outcomes.

Where *Peg Wall* and *Pulley System* are laborious acts one could find on a jobsite, *Gum Chew* is a labor and bonding ritual reminiscent of actions at the end of the day or on a break. The scene of this video frames Sebura&Gartelmann facing the camera sitting in two lawn chairs

outside in a natural setting. Seburu begins by chewing several gumballs drawn from a large bowl between them, passing the chewed mass to Gartelmann to continue. Gartelmann chews the gum, adding a few fresh pieces to the mix. This back and forth sharing continues, making several rounds. As the viscous clump grows, their effort becomes more laborious as the material turns rigid and resistant to their efforts.

*Gum Chew* is an example of a common misunderstanding of the subtleties of male bonding. On a surface level, it is easy to experience discomfort and disgust at seeing the transfer of spit labored into a wad of gum shared between two men. Spit acts as the bond that forms a physical mass representative of a space of trust, vulnerability, and intimacy. Beyond the collaborative effort and the act of chewing, there is a shared silence and philosophical understanding of sitting in a lawn chair enjoying the day without the necessity of a verbally present intellect.

The space of reflection is a secondary bond. There is no need to speak; the shared value of this experience lives in mutual understanding. Gum is an uncanny substitute for what might otherwise be beer, coffee, a cigar, or perhaps just the lawn chairs alone as a place of rest. An internal relation to each other with little material or verbal needs to bear the bond. Seburu&Gartelmann have chewed the gum and have done so being present in the world, present together.

The final video in *Seburu&Gartelmann: Bonded* is *Finger Sew*. The video begins with the alignment of Seburu and Gartelmann's thumbs side by side. One of the artists begins to sew their thumbs together with a needle and thread. The needle punctures through the flesh directly next to each thumbnail, passing back and forth between their thumbs. On each pass, the thread is pulled firmly to create a tightly woven joining of skin.

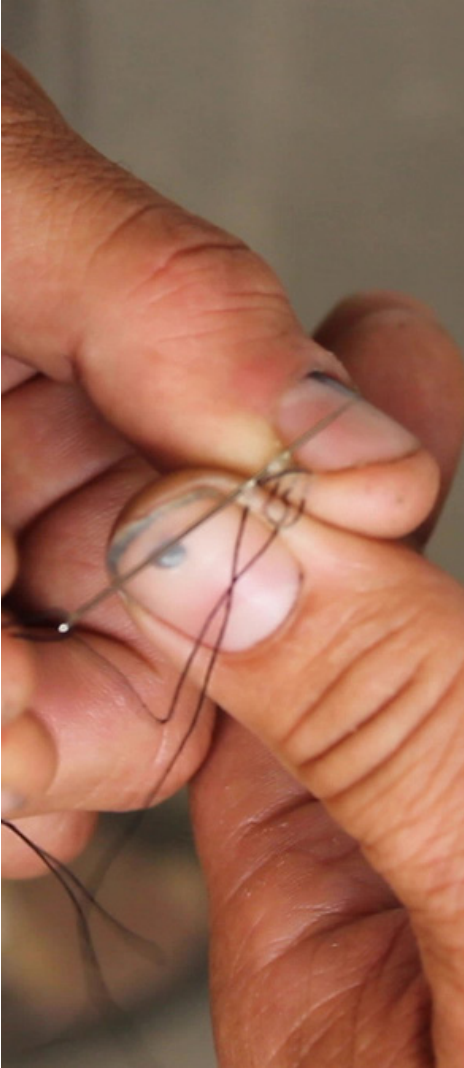




Sebura&Gartelmann, *Gum Chew*, 2020.  
Single-channel video with sound, 12:41  
minutes. Courtesy of the artists.

*Finger Sew* draws attention to an aesthetically informed history through a laborer's hands, symbolizing tangible time through marked flesh. Constant physical exertion causes calluses to form, protecting exposed layers of skin. A callus sets a distinction between rookie and veteran, evidence of earning your stripes. Like a black eye from a fight won or lost; either way, it confirms participation.

*“Sebura&Gartelmann’s collective practice is a participatory act of building value together, bonded.”*



Sebura&Gartelmann sewing their fingers together is an equal bond of participation and time invested in developing their calluses. *Finger Sew* is a conscious act, a ritual bonding that sets the gesture apart. Equally, a relationship and veteran status signified by the performance to achieve *Finger Sew*; a laborer's bond.

The vantage point provided by Sebura&Gartelmann setting up their camera and frame is the literal lens to view their acts of bonding. A viewpoint one can navigate from the information provided but distanced enough to be separated from the danger physically. Sebura&Gartelmann allow the viewer to witness the internal strife and effort, but one cannot truly experience the pain, sweat, fear, and danger that is real and present.

The window Sebura&Gartelmann provide into a relationship between men successfully elevates care and intimacy by including minute moments of vulnerability. These moments breach a historic cultural representation of men driven by

Sebura&Gartelmann, *Finger Sew*, 2019.  
Single-channel video with sound, 2:09  
minutes. Courtesy of the artists.

strength and dominance. What is offered to the viewer is everything, is intimate. Technical additions and movie magic edits do not find a place in the work. Time experienced is in real-time, their framing sets a human scale, and even the viewing angle is as if you were present with them.

Ironically, their key to capturing intimacy, as shared by Sebur& Gartelmann, is that you are not present. Similar to quantum theory, the observer affects the observed reality. A third person, even a videographer, breaks the bond and the actual moment experienced by the two. Their relationship is the work, beyond the scenes, humor, wild ideas, and danger; the relationship experienced is through their set parameters of viewing.

Sebur&Gartelmann describe their collaboration as permission-giving, a generosity absent in their solo art practices. Take a standard skateboarding trick of a kickflip as an example. Learned alone, a kickflip is a technique. A kickflip learned

in a crew evolves into a broader vocabulary of tricks and style shared by a family. Belonging to a crew grants power and confidence to the individual. Sebur&Gartelmann's practice is a participatory act of building value together, bonded.



**“The vantage point provided by Sebura&Gartelmann setting up their own cameras and frames is the literal lens through which you can view their acts of bonding.”**

*- Andrea Oleniczak & Taylor Kurrle*

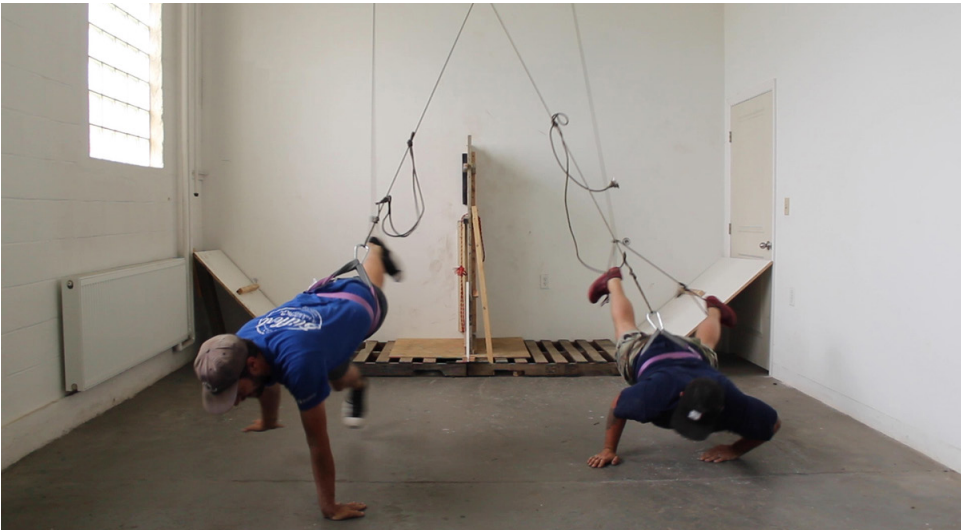
# Gum Chew

2020 | Digital Video (12:41)



# Pulley System

2019 | Digital Video (2:21)



# Finger Sew

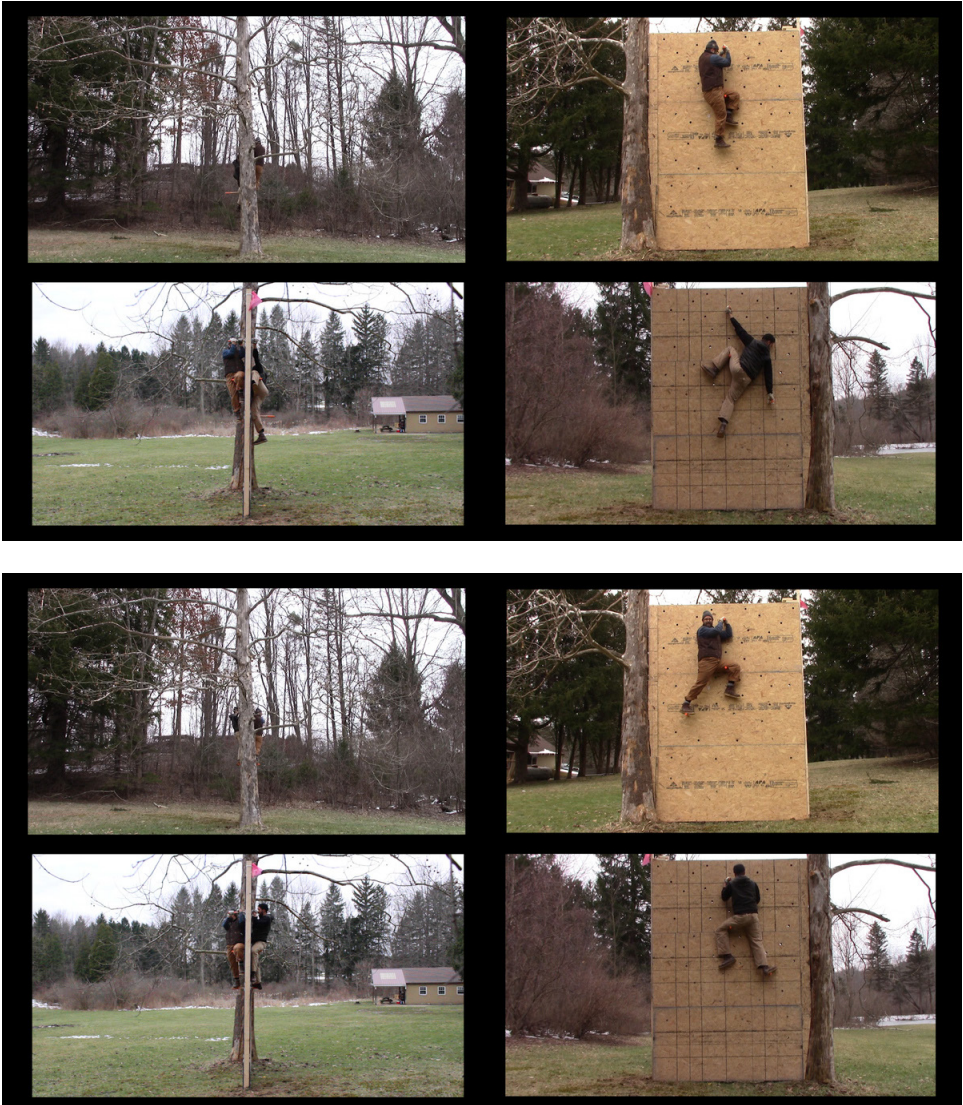
2019 | Digital Video (2:09)





# Peg Wall

2017 | 4 Channel Digital Video (8:28)





**“Their raw ability to express themselves through easily-accessible materials and simple acts elevates the experience of dirty and sometimes dangerous acts and inserts a level of care for the viewer to experience.”**

*- Andrea Oleniczak & Taylor Kurrle*

# Spaces of Care and Discomfort:

A Conversation with Alex Gartelmann and Jonas Seburá

by Emma Ward

**Emma Ward:** First of all, thanks so much for being flexible and talking with us, this whole process has been so crazy. The first few questions we have are just kind of general, more about your process and about how it is you came to figure out the dynamic that comes through in a lot of your work. So as we've talked about, COVID and the way we're operating class [remotely], we've talked about your work a lot more in terms of the intimacy and the physicality of it, and how that is no longer really a possibility in our world. Can you speak to how you feel that impacts your work or how that dynamic is changing with the way the climate changes?

*This interview took place over Zoom in April of 2020, in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

*Questions and answers have been edited for clarity.*

**Alex Gartelmann:** Yeah no problem, So up until this past June, really, Jonas and I had lived apart for eight years. So the quarantine harkens back to that eight-year period where we were just working apart and kind of developing ideas through conversation and then finding these moments of condensed time to come together and work in the studio and together basically, so weirdly, it doesn't feel like a shock, at least for myself here, but it doesn't feel like a real shock to the system because I think that that distance that existed between us for that eight-year period really drove a lot of that kind of physical contact nature of our work.

**Jonas Sebura:** Yeah, I would agree with that. Oddly I think that that was so much, I guess in terms of broader ideas on how we how we made it, how we've gotten to this point in our work. I think that the work has been driven by the distance and designing in these kind of moments of focused time to work together, because we lived in different parts of the country for eight years. And so we would figure out that summers we could take two months and go to a residency and get work made and so in that

kind of been a part of it. And it's also work that we could kind of ruminate on in two different parts of the country, but through phone conversations and in emailing. So yeah, I feel it is odd that it doesn't feel terribly different at this moment in terms of our practice. But thinking through the intimacy has been an interesting development over the past 10 years. And that Alex and I had been making work that was about our own personal experiences separately, but we'd come together to make that work. And then at a certain point, I think it's with the boat piece [*It's Hard To Find Home, But Sometimes You Find It in Someone Else*, 2011] was when we really started to think about the work, that the work was about us, that that piece kind of embodied how he and I worked through an idea in the same space, in a shared space, and that it was kind of about our relationship. It was about how we navigated that shared space.

**Q. What in the current political and cultural climate do you feel is impactful on your work other than COVID?**

**AG:** What a murky question to get into.

**JS:** I think a big part of it has to do with masculinity, right? And kind of trying to infer what the tradition of masculinity is. And I think obviously the last presidential election was so much about toxic masculinity. And we had been working through those ideas for a long time at that point, you know, it had been already seven or eight years that we've been working through those ideas. That really did kind of reinforce what we're doing was important and how we think about the work is really important in that we need to continue to think through how to subvert those ideas and how to get people to ask the question about what we're doing, that we're asking people to question, "What is the nature of our relationship? What does male intimacy look like?"

**Q. A few people were interested by your involvement in skate culture. How do you feel your concepts and exploration of masculinity ties into your interest in skate culture, and how that dynamic has played out for you guys?**

**AG:** I think one of the things that's particularly interesting about skate culture is that it is a hyper masculine realm, right? And that's not a debatable thing, that's an objective statement that I feel comfortable making. But I think that one thing that's particularly interesting about it is the context in which you engage in that subculture. Where I grew up, it was not considered a masculine thing to do, like playing lacrosse was considered a much more normal thing to do. For me as an adolescent, who was engaging in skate culture, but with a really small number of people who are also all male, to do that then in turn brought things like homophobic slurs. This basically created a hierarchy within what masculinity is. What I was interested in and what I was choosing to do, even though it was absolutely a masculine space, it was this liminality, right? There are all these gray spaces of masculinity.

adult being able to look kind of retroactively at that, what does that mean to be in a hyper masculine space that actually doesn't feel hyper masculine in the moment that you're experiencing it? How does that shape the way that you think about the world later?

**JS:** Mm hmm. And I had this exact parallel experience, right? We were outsiders. We weren't the jocks, we were also kids that were interested in art, which is also not seen as particularly masculine, at least when you're a teenager. Obviously, now looking at the art world, you realize how much of our world is driven by masculinity. But as kids, if you're a kid that likes to draw or whatever, it's like what's wrong with you? You know, "You don't play sports, and you like to draw, what's up with that?" That same sort of homophobic way. And the one thing I would say in agreeing with Alex is that it is a hyper masculine thing that we're a part of, but it's also a really caring and giving thing. We're all, at least the crew that I grew up with, and I know Alex's crew that he grew up with, it was so much a part of our family. It was about an escape for

us from maybe our home lives between all of our friends and it was a really safe, caring space. So I think that that also changes the conversation for me a little bit around the idea of masculinity, that Alex and I's caring relationship was built because we both had these similar experiences through skateboarding.

**AG:** I think that there's also a class element to it, that I think is really important to consider. You know, like to not be able to afford to do traveling sports with all these equipment and league fees, and that skateboarding was something that we could do with a group of super intimate, close friends that wasn't prohibitively expensive and that you could support each other in swapping equipment or whatever it was. It didn't feel exclusionary because of money. And I think that was a really important part for me, that it was a space that I didn't feel [excluded.] Because I think tied to this notion of masculinity, to be really good at sports generally meant your parents had money, so they could send you to a camp and buy you all this shit. And when you didn't have that, and it was evident that you didn't have that, it was just another way to be othered within

**Q. I'm from a hockey area, that makes complete sense in terms of being cost prohibitive. Do you think that parallel experience is what drew you together and has helped fuel your collaboration?**

**JS:** Oh, yeah. 100%. Yeah, like I said, the supportive nature of what the skateboarding community is like. And Alex and I have talked about this before, the idea that if it wasn't for skateboarding I wouldn't have been interested in art, nor music and punk rock and so when Alex and I met we had that similar parallel, right? That those things were kind of a part of that, at least in our areas, but we were a part of that specific culture. We had common ground and so that was kind of our first towing of, "Oh, I know you like. We could be friends. Definitely." And then it just built from there, right? It was, "Oh, you had this experience. I had a similar experience," and kind of built on it from there and kind of back and forth, back and forth.

**AG:** And I also think that in a more foundational underpinning of our practice, that space of adolescence was one that was incredibly permissive. You know, as opposed to being in these other realms that are prescriptive around adults basically dictating how you should function, what you should be doing, how you should be spending your time, how you should think about the world, how you should think about your future. And so one of the big differences between our personal practices and our collaborative practice is that it's all about permission. There's very few, if any, hang-ups on just trying stuff out. If somebody has an idea, where in our own practices, we will both talk ourselves out of doing anything for any reason. It's so much harder to make work. And so I think that because there's this kind of shared ideological foundation about how to operate in the world, through this lens of permission giving, that that kind of space of growing up that's fundamental to identity shaping has played a really big part in how we work together.



**Q. How do you feel your collaborative process has helped you grow in your own individual processes? And how does that fuel your individual work?**

**JS:** It's like Alex said, traditionally we both talk ourselves out of our personal ideas, right? I come up with a lot of excuses when I'm in the studio, "Oh, I can't do this. Oh, is this a good idea?" And then the inverse of Alex and I working together, "Oh, I have this idea. What do you think about x, y, and z?" "Oh, yeah, yeah." And then it like just builds and snowballs really quickly. With that being said, for me, our collaborative work has taught me to try to let go a little bit, to give myself permission to do that more. Still not anywhere close to as easy as our collaborative practice is. But I have begun to say "Oh, yeah, I can make this to make this, it's okay. I don't need to overly conceptualize this idea right now," right? Like, yes, that's important at some point, but right now, I don't need to do that, I can just give myself some freedom to work. I can try to give myself some freedom to work.

**AG:** I think that in the collaborative work, it's so much about this trust that we have in each other. There's a trust in that we'll be able to be rigorous in how we edit through our ideas, but also in that there's really no bad idea. It's just there's kind of like a seed within anything, even if it's completely absurd. It's like, "Well, maybe it's not that, but how do we take that idea and grow it into something else?" And so that notion of trust that I have in Jonas and that he has in me is also something that I try to remind myself to trust myself and to trust my ideas and to remind myself constantly that it will all shake out in the end, even if it feels incredibly fraught and uncertain in the moment. But that's what actually makes it easier working in the studio.

**Q. Do you think that the trust you have in the relationship you've built has helped you to take a lot of the risks in your work, and how do you see risk playing out in your collaboration?**

**JS:** [laughing] That's a funny one. I think if I could substitute the word risk for discomfort, I think [that] is maybe more important for us in that situation. Like a window into our collaborative brainstorming: one of the most recent experiences of this happening is last summer we're working through some ideas and Alex says, "Oh, man, what if we start a shared gumball and we just keep adding to it and keep sharing the gumball?" I was like, "Fuck, no, no way. No." But there's something in there and then [we] bounced a bunch of ideas back and forth. And within an hour and a half, I was just like, "Fuck you, dude. You are so right. That is absolutely it." It makes me so uncomfortable and grosses me out so much. But that's the thing that's the most potent visual, right? That's like pure trust that's all about friendship and care and trust and all those things. And so, I think discomfort is far more important

and I think that we're always trying to toe the line of if it makes us uncomfortable, but uncomfortable through the lens of our practice, then that might be saying potentially something important for the viewer.

**AG:** Yeah, and I think that those spaces of discomfort, from a viewer's perspective, even though it may be an incredibly specific act, the way that it becomes this much larger multivalent subjective potential thing, when it's in that space of discomfort, and it's not just this kind of rote seeming expected interaction, that's when that really broad lens of subjective interpretation can happen. Because you don't really know what our relationship is when we get into those spaces of discomfort because I think that even for us, we fully trust each other. And I think that we are able to just work through whatever that is.

**Q. Do you find yourself having a lot of creative disagreement? Or does collaboration facilitate a more productive work environment?**

**JS:** I can't stand being around this guy. No, like Alex said, I don't think we ever approached anything like a bad idea. It's like, "Huh, okay. Let's, think through that, how can we build on that?" It's never a dismissive thing at all. I think because we're truly interested in the collaborative experience that there's no ego involved in what we do. And I think that's where disagreement would come from or collaborative arguing would come from, but I don't think that there's an ego involved in it. At least I think we work really hard to not let ego become a part of it. And when we're thinking through ideas, there's a reason why Alex is bringing those to the table because he thinks it's important. And so even if I'm not sure about it, let's consider that as a real possibility, and how do we build on that?

**AG:** Also, we really enjoy working together—it's fun to make work together and not to say that at times, in the moment of trying to figure out how to make something, it's not a pain in the ass. It's not between he and I, you know, there's like an incredible amount of joy that comes from working together that, in the studio by myself, those moments feel fewer and far between. Whereas

anytime we're in the studio together, it feels good. As another insight into this studio practice that dovetails into this is that when we're in the studio together, when we're actually working on something, we actually talk very little. Because we don't need to, right? We just understand what the other person needs, who's doing what, what step of the process we're in. And so usually it would be the most boring thing to watch the two of us work together because we don't talk, except every 30 minutes someone has a dumb joke or refers to some decade old inside joke because you used a tool in a specific way. But you know, I think that that level of understanding, how to work with one another, is also a really critical. We don't disagree on stuff because it's about supporting each other in this way that we don't even have to talk to do that.

**Q. When my peers did the studio visit, they noticed that there was very little fear of failure and you embrace that as part of the creative process. Do you think that is due to the collaborative nature of what you do?**

**JS:** I think it's definitely a part of it. I think there's two different types of failure in our work. One half of a failure is like fully designed into the work, that things are designed to collapse, to fail, to break, to end in pain in some way, or at least calamity I should say, maybe not pain, but calamity. And then the other part of failure is the really real failure, like, "Oh, I just can't figure this out" failure, "this thing isn't going to work" failure. And I think that that is also the trust that that's going to be fine. It's definitely a part of our collaborative practice, even if something does fail, there's always a nugget of that that's really important, that's a learning experience, right? And I think that that's the idea of creative problem solving. It's designed into the process, that through failure, we're constantly trying to find the thing that might work and might be built upon. Because things fail, but not through

design. It's like, "Oh, this sucks this isn't a good work of art. This is a piece of shit," right? But then there's a moment, "Oh wait, there's this nugget," or maybe even in five years from now, that nugget will pop up. "Remember that thing we tried but didn't come together? Here's this component that we didn't see then. But let's build on that right now." I think that's the only way we know how to go through the world is to keep working through that. And I think that also has a big part to do with skateboarding too, oddly enough. Every public planner and architect that designs something that doesn't do the thing. But for us, it's always something that we can build on, right? That we can find a solution to the thing that we need through skateboarding, right? It's like, we can use this, what was designed as a perfect bench, is actually a perfect ledge to grind down or something like that, right? So I think that's kind of ingrained in us in a lot of ways too.

**AG:** You know, in a lot of ways, our practice is iterative, it's not one thing feeds into the next. So, for things to not work is actually more important than to have things that do work, because then we understand what

the limits of the ideas are or the limits of the practices in that moment, at least. I think that that failure aspect is really critical in that it's also a permission giving tool again, where we know it's not always going to work, we know we're going to make bad work because you have to, you know? You can't make good work without making the bad work. You can't have anything work without having things fail really, really badly.

**Q. A lot of your work is very physical and almost slapstick humor. How do you feel humor playing into your creative process and into your works?**

**AG:** Well, I think it stems from a variety of things. I mean, the kind of genesis of the physical, more slapstick driven type of action came from the two of us thinking about, you know, we both worked in the trades for a long time. And so these moments on a jobsite where you're doing something with another person just to get it finished, even though it's probably not the safest thing to do, but you're putting an incredible level of trust in another person to stand on top of a ladder in a way you're not supposed to or use a tool in a way that you're definitely

not supposed to. And so that was kind of like the starting point and then thinking, "Okay you know, the jobsite is a hyper masculine space," right? What are these gestures that we can choreograph that start to challenge what that kind of hyper masculine mode of operating is? And what are other places in culture that we can start looking to that use the semiotic nature of that type of interaction? Things like slapstick, like Buster Keaton, or Looney Tunes. People always bring up *Jackass* with us, and that for us is a benchmark of where to stop, when it starts to feel like that. Then it's not working, right? Because it morphs into this like super bro-y thing and then you lose all the nuance that we're trying to build in about these questions about what masculinity is and how the nature of intimacy and love between men is shared. It disappears once you hit that.

**JS:** I think the Stooges are really great. The Three Stooges are a really great example of absurdity but care and slapstick. They love each other, but will do what they have to do to get this thing done. It's definitely so much a part of the work. I think we

also just enjoy having fun too, right. Like in our studio practices. I don't think anyone would argue with us when we say that our studio practice is rigorous, but we like having fun. Why else would we do it? And I think that that is so much a part of who we are as people and who we are as a collaborative that that has no way but to seep into the work really deeply.

**Q. That's so funny, the Three Stooges were the exact reference I was thinking of. Who and what are some of your other points of inspiration for your work?**

**AG:** We love Wile E. Coyote and the Roadrunner. Just in terms of someone who gets harebrained contraptions to try to accomplish a task. We also look a lot at film and how different types of shots are constructed. And how certain types of shots work as a tool for driving narrative, and how we can employ things that are maybe outside of our realm as two people who are trained as object makers to try and use this in a way that makes sense to us when it's not really a process or material that we're necessarily super comfortable with. Then of course,

there's art people. [laughing] There are art people.

**JS:** [also laughing] "There are art people."

**AG:** We both love like Gordon Matta Clark and Ana Mendieta, a really wide array. I think one of the things that's a great part about our relationship is that we love a huge range of making and I think that often we're really looking at people who are kind of working against whatever moment they're in. A really big influence for us is self-taught visionary art. It's not necessarily overtly referenced in the work visually, but as a philosophical way of operating in the studio, also in the notions of giving yourself permission to do whatever you want in that moment, that realm of makers is probably one of the most critical influences on us as artists.

**Q. In your process, Wile E. Coyote is nothing if not resourceful, do you find yourselves trying to use unconventional materials? Or thinking about using objects for an inappropriate purpose in your work?**

**JS:** I think that there's kind of an interesting part of that. I think especially right now in the studio for Alex and I we're starting to embark on a new method of making in terms of the performative works and that we find ourselves inventing new systems or taking the language of something that we know exists in the world. In direct referencing, we're thinking about building these larger, more complex rigs for filming and for shooting video. We know these things exist in the film world, right? And so we're taking that idea of a rolling dolly for a camera, and we're making our own weird half-assed hodgepodge version of that to get the shot that is of that nature, but potentially much different or like a sculptural version of that, to do something that we have our sights set on. And I think that that resourcefulness comes through. I think it goes back to creative problem solving too, that we're both lucky enough that we've been able to gain a lot of skills over the years and a lot of material knowledge and so we can dig deep in that bag of tricks for a particular thing, a particular harebrained idea that might pop into our heads in the same way that Wile E. Coyote might build a crazy refrigerator, ski jump thing.

**AG:** Yeah. And I also think because our work in some ways is really responsive to the moment, or to the place that we're in, it becomes about working with what's at hand, just because it is responsive, either site specifically or even a little bit broader than just a specific site, but contextually specific. I think that was a conceptual linkage between where we are and what we're doing - that we try to engage more readily with what is at hand as opposed to bringing in a bunch of stuff that maybe feels a little bit alien to the space that we're in or that we're trying to engage with.

**Q. What are some of the experiences you have had that you feel are most useful and most conducive to the way you collaborate now?**

**JS:** I think we've been really lucky, especially when we've been living apart for so long or working in two different parts of the country, to get artists residences. Those become this really conducive environment for us where we have focused time to dig through and mine new work. So I think from a broad kind of making standpoint, those have been really

deeply valuable for us and being a part of artist communities, right? That there's a support in artist communities that is kind of unparalleled in the same way that it feels like going to school and the studio mates you have at school, it's like that same supportive environment. And so that's been a really rich place for us to be making and to have access to.

**AG:** Yeah, I also think that Jonas leaving Chicago—moving away—us ending up not being in the same place was actually probably the most important thing that happened in our practice in a lot of ways. Because up until that moment, we had started tying into the video work, but we had really fallen into this way of making where we would get a project, and it would kind of fall within a certain set of parameters. We wouldn't really have to think outside of what we had really dialed in as a thing—and the thing might have looked different than the thing before but essentially, it was the same thing over and over again. And we were both feeling kind of stuck in that and frustrated with that, and then he moved, and we couldn't make that kind of work anymore, just because of the nature

of proximity. Neither of us made anything for six months. It felt super traumatic. Super, super traumatic. I mean, we have been working non-stop for two straight years, just churning out work. All of a sudden, it was just like, "We're not in the same space anymore. How do we do this?" It was a six month period where we did nothing even in our personal studios, and I think that that moment of processing radically shifted the way that we thought about our practice. And also I think that in a lot of ways it really made us both realize that it was a priority as well, that it felt important to continue it because we easily could have just been like, "Eh, I don't know."

**JS:** "It's not convenient."

**AG:** "It's not convenient, let's not do it anymore." But I think that it was this moment that really galvanized the studio practice in a way that has allowed us to maintain it for 10 years.



**“We don’t disagree on stuff because it’s about supporting each other in this way that we don’t even have to talk to do that.”**

*- Alex Gartelmann & Jonas Seburu*

# Acknowledgements & Credits

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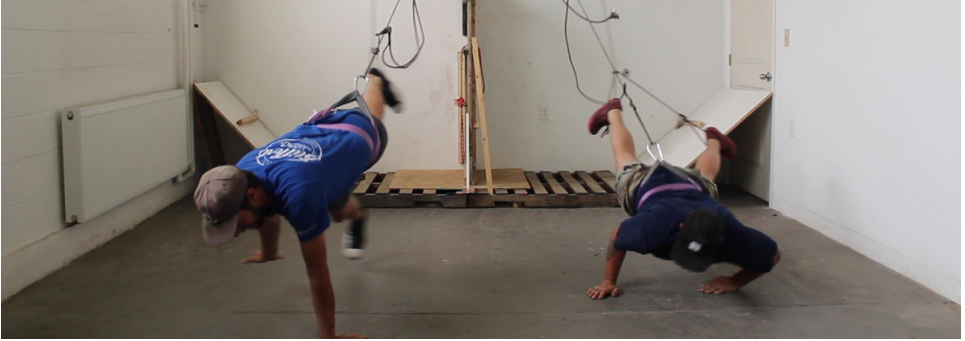
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*This catalog was designed by Esther Cho (lead designer) and Juan Dehoyos (graphics).*

# About Design Thinking for Exhibits



Design Thinking for Exhibits is a class taught by professor Anna Campbell. The class developed an exhibition over the course of the 2020 academic spring semester, using MMoCA as a critical training ground for hands-on application. Stemming from a shared interest in utilizing museum spaces for direct learning, this cross-institutional venture cultivates the next generation of museum professionals by introducing participants to the practical and theoretical matters of curation. The resulting exhibition opened in the museum's Imprint Gallery on June 6, 2020, and was on view through September 27, 2020.

For this course, classroom-based learning with Professor Campbell employed the strategies of design thinking—a human-centered approach to understanding and solving real world problems. Discussions focus on the politics and ethics associated with exhibitions as social engagement and on the curator's role in articulating conversations between art objects and the public. Students engaged in extensive dialogue and collaboration with key museum staff on practical concerns such as exhibition timelines, installation logistics and design, and how to compose curatorial texts for the public.

