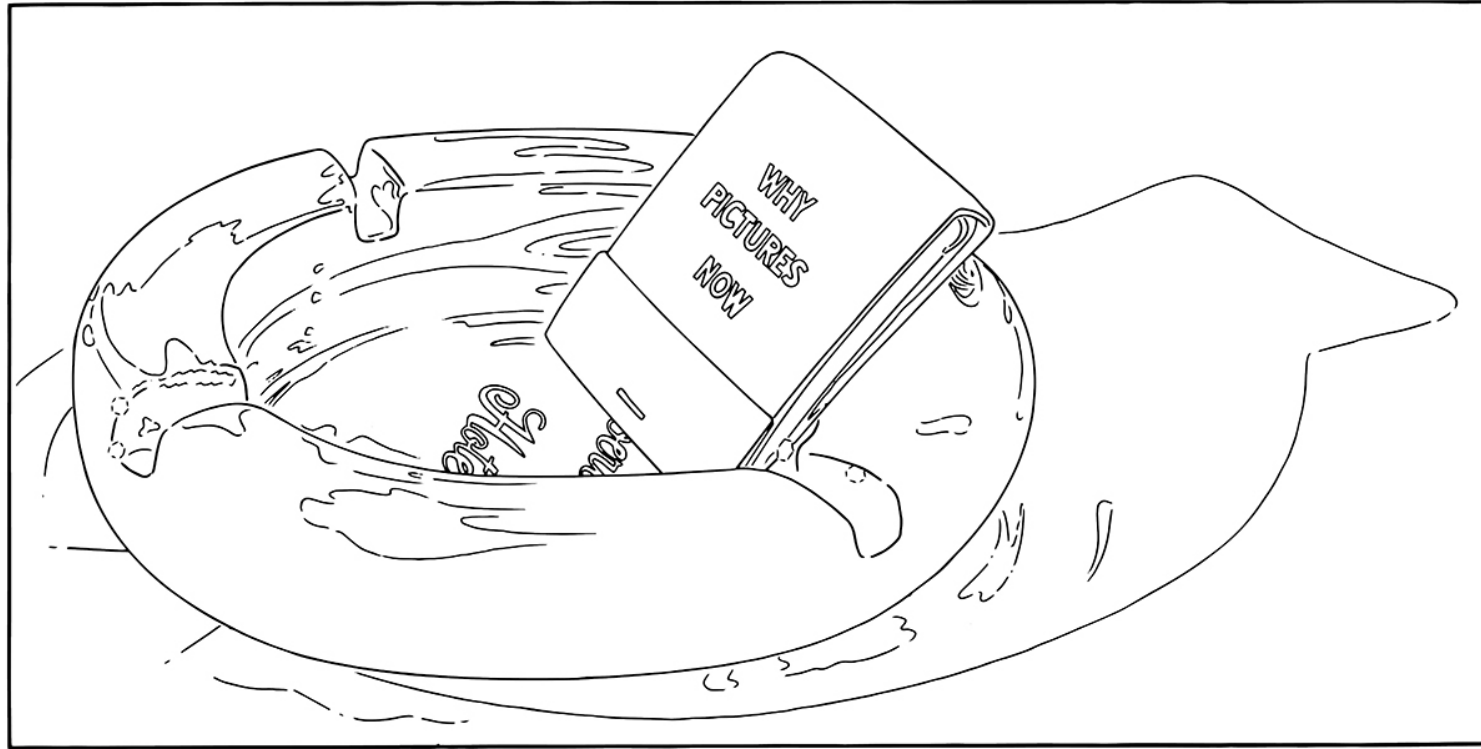


Louise Lawler **Receptions**



## Louise Lawler **Receptions**

ROXANA MARCOCI

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

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Louise Lawler's artwork is frequently interpreted through ideas of the beholder and the beholder's reception of it—ideas most often associated with postmodern critique. Lawler's art in actuality is nothing like criticism or scholarship, its receiving/reception functions nothing like theirs, which renders aesthetic phenomena stable through practices of iteration, explication, or writing. The reception of an artwork is where meaning, a verbal form of representation, becomes adhered to an artwork, and this system includes various modes—biography, anecdote, everyday or applied theory—as well as the habits and propositions of artists' lectures, interviews, and other common oral and written forms of commentary on modern and contemporary art. The sociohistorical effects of Lawler's art are lodged within rather than outside of the work. Lawler's is a camera-based activity that recasts representation as a relational practice, since it is inclusive of multiple approaches to imagery, form, and situation, reflexively recording its own current moment and recent past (and the artist's recent past as well). Often Lawler's photographs capture artworks by others, in conditions from the very public to the expressly private. Some of her photographs create a pervasive sense that Lawler is alone in a room or gallery, her looking a way of being candid with viewers about the dynamic identity of the work she is photographing, about its status as both an object that is aesthetically meaningful and one of performatives and projections—of quotidian and scholarly reception alike, of accruals of value in terms of wealth, status, and legacy. Lawler has been revisiting her own imagery in her "adjusted to fit" works since 2011, and her tracings since 2013.

Critics usually identify, in this receptionlike effect, a factual or informational function, but they vary on whether such documentary effects are indirect (as in one critic's "oblique")<sup>1</sup> or direct (as in others' "useful")<sup>2</sup> or "merely arranging."<sup>3</sup> Here a notion of depiction (photographic) seems to blur or dull the careful self-awareness and socially imbedded awareness (reflexivity) of that dynamic identity at play in Lawler's cultural activity, the seeing and being seen—call it the watching of aesthetic reception as one such scene of projections. This is a scene in which Lawler casts her own work as always implicated, never distantly outside. The last critical view, of "merely arranging"—a neutral term turned pejorative thanks to its adverbial qualifier—reduces the work to something like journalism and projects onto it a passivity, an absence of potency. Perhaps this is partly a result of Lawler declining to offer her own verbal modifiers for her work, or, really, to expound upon it at all: over the thirty or so years that comprise written record of her work's reception, the artist has participated in only three interviews for publication.<sup>4</sup>

How does a work come back, if it can? Or, rather, I should ask: how can a work continue anew? I wonder whether Lawler's reflexivity may be working differently, now that the conditions of the artist's own reception are in forward motion at varying speeds or scales (in collections and the art market, institutional and smaller-scale institutional, academic), now that Lawler has been featured in more than one museum survey (the exhibition that this volume accompanies being the third) and has been the subject of multiple catalogues and publications. (And now that early nonphotographic works such as *Birdcalls* and *A Movie Will Be Shown Without the Picture*, long unseen, are being restaged.)<sup>5</sup> With Lawler's photographs and other works being reexhibited—figuratively and literally, within her practice in "adjusted to fit" works and tracings and in re-exhibitions outside of it—how do elements and conditions outside the original works come into play, and how does Lawler's work show her watching these multiplying contexts and contingencies? This essay speculates on these and related questions by taking up aspects of Lawler's practice through comparisons and connections with projects by other artists: Orchard gallery's critical approach to casting light on the reception between Lawler and other artists; a 1978 project by Michael Asher, photographed by Lawler in 2000; and Cameron Rowland's objects and lists of materials from 2016 that make everyday life permeable to societal systems, posing questions about personhood, property, and the prison system, a version of which is included in Lawler's MoMA exhibition. Each such crossing or exchange of Lawler with others serves as a particular instance of an artist or artists' receiving an aspect of Lawler's work, or vice versa. Here is the special openness within Lawler's practice, a vibrational loop of engagement that runs through reciprocity and response, pointing the work ever outward toward relational and collective expression. To write about Lawler's practice through the work of other artists is also in some small way to amplify the extralinguistic effects of Lawler's work (thus the physical phrasing of vibrational loop), to put criticism's usual assuredness about the primacy of language to a minor test.

#### Community

In *Heard Not Seen*, a presentation of sound works at the Lower East Side gallery Orchard in 2006, several works could be experienced together: Lawler's poster for *MoMA in Hamburg: Louise Lawler* (2005, fig. 1) and *Birdcalls* (1972/1981); Adrian Piper's *Aspects of the Liberal Dilemma* (1978); and Andrea Fraser's *Untitled (Audio)* (2003/2004).<sup>6</sup> Fraser, a member of the gallery, decided to juxtapose Lawler's poster with Gertrude Stein's text "Matisse"



Fig. 1 Poster for *MoMA in Hamburg: Louise Lawler*, Kunstverein in Hamburg, April 16–July 3, 2005. Printed paper, 46¼ × 64 in. (118.7 × 162.6 cm)

1. Douglas Crimp, introduction to "Prominence Given, Authority Taken: An Interview with Louise Lawler by Douglas Crimp," *Grey Room* 4 (Summer 2001): 71. The interview was previously published, in a slightly different form, in Johannes Meinhardt, Crimp, and Lawler, *Louise Lawler: An Arrangement of Pictures* (New York: Assouline, 2000).  
2. "LL: Yes. A photograph presents information. Different information depending on its format and context. Serge Guilbaut, an art historian/critic, once said my work is useful. It is comforting to at least be producing a document of the recent past, but I hope I am doing more than mirroring some

aspects of our cultural preoccupations, but that is part of it and I think has more resonance when it is done 'on time.'" Lawler, in Andreas Reiter Raabe, "The Work I Produce Is Something Like Fishing," *Eikon* 21–22 (July 1997): 13. Lawler was paraphrasing Guilbaut, repeating his "useful."  
3. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Memory Images of Art under Spectacle," in Philipp Kaiser, ed., *Louise Lawler: Adjusted* (Cologne: Museum Ludwig; Munich: Prestel, 2013), p. 77.  
4. Lawler does accept invitations, if infrequently, to lecture about her work.

5. For one such project that made plenty of space for critical reflecting, see Tanja Baudoin and Sven Lütticken, eds., *A Movie Will Be Shown Without the Picture* (Amsterdam: If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution and Idea Books, 2014).  
6. *Heard Not Seen* was organized by Andrea Fraser, Christian Philipp Müller, R. H. Quaytman, and Karin Schneider and ran at Orchard, New York, March 10–April 9, 2006.

from 1909, a decision that was conscious: an argument, curatorially asserted, about artistic continuum.<sup>7</sup> “Precedent,” when used to talk about artists, is a term that explicitly articulates genealogies, previous cases, paradigms. Fraser, one of Orchard’s cofounders, wrote, in an e-mail after a group meeting, “One of the things that could be very worthwhile to demonstrate with our gallery is that artistic histories and genealogies matter; that the value of our work as artists, writers, and curators is not just determined by the market, but by artistic and intellectual traditions and projects that we hope to further.”<sup>8</sup> Fraser had published a critical essay about Lawler’s practice two decades earlier in *Art in America*, and they had collaborated on a video work (page 150), to mention only two of the more public aspects of a long-term artistic and intellectual exchange and friendship between them.<sup>9</sup> The idea of articulating and working from precedent, from influences, relationships, and exchanges, links Orchard (which was active from 2005 to 2008) with Parasite, another artist-run project in New York (active from 1997 to 1998), where genealogies and earlier or existing models were considered important in creating a larger history of art, one including project-based work, site-specific work, conceptual work, artist advocacy, and political organizing.<sup>10</sup> The Document Collection, an archive constructed by the group, was intended as an active intervention, something that would build historical awareness of and visibility for these practices and the contexts in which they took place.<sup>11</sup> In the sense of its similar emphasis on such historical awareness, Parasite can be seen as a precursor to Orchard—as one of its precedents. Lawler was not a founding member of either project, although her work was shown regularly at Orchard, but she can be linked to both through the capturing of collectivity in her work’s subjects and structures. Each of her works can be understood to perform and project a field of relations (or community), to cast artistic reception as communal. Her work’s presence in *Heard Not Seen* exemplified these qualities of her art in general.

A poster that Lawler had produced for *MoMA in Hamburg*, an exhibition at the Kunstverein in Hamburg, was one of only two visible images included in *Heard Not Seen* (Piper’s work was the other). Both this poster, which in Hamburg had been displayed in multiples, and another one for the Hamburg show used photographs Lawler had taken in 2004 at The Museum of Modern Art’s newly renovated space, thus mimicking and twisting the Hamburg project with images of MoMA: was the Kunstverein in Hamburg subsumed under the aegis of the New York institution, or was it the inverse?<sup>12</sup> Lawler’s other contribution to *Heard Not Seen* was the seven-minute audio recording *Birdcalls*, played once every hour in the gallery. In it we hear Lawler voicing the

names of artists (all of them male) as birdcalls, so that the work becomes a catalogue of birdcalls and the identifications between bird and artist, making a sonorous joke of the vaunted singularity of a name. Conceived during the 1970s, the work constitutes an act of joking that demonstrates Lawler’s awareness of the contradictions of being both an artist and a woman—her sense of the same radical feminist consciousness of that era described by the philosopher Teresa de Lauretis as “grounded in a real contradiction for women in the world designed and governed by men, a conceptual and experiential contradiction in which women are necessarily caught as social beings, in which no other political or social thought but feminism has seen fit to consider.”<sup>13</sup>

*Birdcalls* is voiced in the visceral medium of sound, landing it to the side of applied theory and deconstructive projects, which treat nonlinguistic phenomena and art using strictly language-specific terms or analogies. A proposition about representation being visual, and perhaps nonverbal or extralinguistic, may lie within Lawler’s absence of discursive self-commentary, as might another proposition about photography’s missing parts, cuts, and elisions, contrary to its indexicality. Lawler doesn’t need to speak (apart from in and through her art), because subjects and selfhood (Lawler herself, me, and you) are already being positioned, are already being voiced and figured, by the looks, situations, and systems within which she works—not to mention by the everyday social world, both conceptually and experientially.<sup>14</sup> *Birdcalls* and *MoMA in Hamburg*, in their nonverbal qualities, align Lawler’s acts and images with feminist traditions and tactics of body art and with female-specific uses of psychology, affect, and everyday life. The artist’s consciousness of being on a continuum with other feminist practices tends to be overlooked by critics in favor of the more stable reception narratives associated with Conceptual art and first-generation institutional critique. Histories of feminist activism and unwritten, oral, or praxis-based forms of knowledge transmission are echoed in the call-and-response within and outside Lawler’s work. History in Lawler’s hands may be defined as just such an acute awareness of cultural forms of community and transmission, and of their habits and structures.

To view Lawler’s work in small-scale projects and group shows such as *Heard Not Seen* is to see a set of effects that are difficult to characterize but are delimited by the transmission of imagery and ideas among artists, in a private sense of artistic influence and a public sense of artists looking at the works of others, both of them dynamics that paradoxically occur outside the original works. Lawler’s contribution to the journal *October* in the fall of 1983, of a portfolio of black-and-white photographs; the selection

and arrangement, with the curator Brian Wallis, of photographs for *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation* in 1984; and the project to collaborate on photographs for publication in Douglas Crimp’s book *On the Museum’s Ruins* in 1993 are just a handful of examples. The telescoping play of images in a 2006 work by R. H. Quaytman visualizes such dynamics and is instructive in understanding the kinds of reception processes and communal systems that Lawler’s work deals in. In May 2005 Christian Philipp Müller shot Fraser performing *May I Help You?* (1991/2005, fig. 2). In Müller’s photograph, Fraser, standing very near Lawler’s *The Princess, Now the Queen* (2005), a photograph of Andy Warhol’s portrait of Crown Princess Sonja of Norway, acts with the image, using it as a prop.<sup>15</sup> The title of the painting that Quaytman created from Müller’s photograph describes a nesting doll of artistic tradition and interartist reception: *Painters Without Paintings and Paintings Without Painters, Chapter 8 (Christian Philipp Müller’s Picture of Andrea Fraser Performing May I Help You? at Orchard in Front of Louise Lawler’s Picture of an Andy Warhol Painting)* (fig. 3). In the work’s square silkscreen panel Quaytman has silenced Fraser’s performance-art monologue, and Fraser is stilled as Müller caught her in the act of embodying her work and beholding Lawler’s (which beholds Warhol).<sup>16</sup> From an external position that posits the Quaytman painting as a tool for viewing Lawler’s small silver dye bleach print, these works can be seen to follow each other: the sphere of the princess’s head, partially blocked in Lawler’s image by an obscure black form and Fraser’s head. Fraser looks at the princess as if looking into a mirror, a doubled front-and-back relationship that Quaytman emphasizes by cropping the photograph.

#### Property

Since 2003 and the United States–led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which produced two wars, such real-world concerns as war and the antiwar demonstrations against them; the news media’s coverage of terrorism; the deaths of Iraqi civilians; and the expansion of the U.S. military’s use of drones have formed a large part of Lawler’s political awareness, which can be gleaned through her work.

In February 2003 Lawler presented an event in the small upstairs gallery of Metro Pictures, New York, called *Four Nudes*, with a print of her photograph *Nude* (2002/2003, page 173) on each of the space’s four walls.<sup>17</sup> On February 15, the day of the opening, a demonstration against President George W. Bush’s proposed invasion of Iraq took place near the United Nations headquarters in New York. (One month later the war in Iraq started). *Four Nudes* stressed the repetition and placement of



7. Orchard, an experimental, artist-run gallery, was founded by the artists Moyra Davey, Fraser, Nicolás Guagnini, Gareth James, Müller, Jeff Preiss, Quaytman, Schneider, and Jason Simon; the systems analyst (and Müller’s partner) John Yancy, Jr.; a member who elected to remain anonymous; and me.

8. Fraser, “Orchard Questionnaire,” January 2005, in the author’s Orchard archives, Los Angeles.

9. Fraser, “In and Out of Place,” *Art in America* 73, no. 6 (June 1985): 124.

10. Parasite was a self-organized artists’ initiative founded and operated by a group (subject to change) of around

twenty-five artists, including Julie Ault, Martin Beck, Mark Dion, Renée Green, Ben Kinmont, Christian Marclay, Nils Norman, and the four artists who would go on to cofound Orchard in 2005: Fraser, Davey, Müller, and Simon.

11. Rebecca Matalon, e-mail to the author, June 11, 2016. See Matalon, “PARASITE, 1997–1998: ‘It’s Always While Looking at the Part That the Whole Is Seen to Be Moving’” (master’s thesis, Roski School of Art and Design, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 2013).

12. *MoMA in Hamburg: Louise Lawler* ran April 16–July 3, 2005, at the Kunstverein in Hamburg.

13. Teresa de Lauretis, “The Practice of Sexual Difference and Feminist Thought in Italy: An Introductory Essay,” in *Libreria delle donne di Milano, Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*, ed. de Lauretis, trans. de Lauretis and Patricia Cicogna (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 12.

14. Fraser considers Lawler’s practice to be performative according to histories of feminist theory and practice, film, and performance art. See George Baker and Fraser, “Displacement and Condensation: A Conversation on the Work of Louise Lawler,” in Kaiser, ed., *Louise Lawler and Others* (Basel:

Kunstmuseum Basel, Museum für Gegenwartskunst; Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2004), pp. 105–43. “I wouldn’t call her work ‘performance art’—‘performative’ maybe, but in 1985 that term was not yet part of the critical lexicon.” *Ibid.*, p. 110.

15. *Part One* (May 11–May 29, 2005) was the first segment of Orchard’s inaugural exhibition, organized by Fraser, Quaytman, and me. It consisted of Fraser’s performance *May I Help You?*, which took place in an exhibition-in-process, including works by Luis Camnitzer, Davey, Guagnini, James, Lawler, Allan McCollum, John Miller, Müller, Preiss, Quaytman, Martha Rosler, Daniela Rossell, Simon, and Lawrence Weiner.

16. *Birdcalls* and *The Princess, Now the Queen* were included in a nearby exhibition on view at the same time: *In and Out of Place: Louise Lawler and Andy Warhol*, May 15, 2005–April 10, 2006,

Dia: Beacon, Beacon, New York.

17. *Four Nudes*, Metro Pictures, New York, opened February 15, 2003.

Fig. 2 Andrea Fraser and Jeff Preiss performing *May I Help You?* (1991/2005), Orchard, New York, March–April 2006. Photograph by Christian Philipp Müller

Fig. 3 R. H. Quaytman, *Painters Without Paintings and Paintings Without Painters, Chapter 8 (Christian Philipp Müller’s Picture of Andrea Fraser Performing May I Help You? at Orchard in Front of Louise Lawler’s Picture of an Andy Warhol Painting)*, 2006. Silkscreen ink and gesso on wood, 20 × 20 in. (50.8 × 50.8 cm)

a single image—of a Gerhard Richter painting from the 1960s showing a nude descending a staircase—being deinstalled after the closing of a large-scale exhibition of the artist's work at The Museum of Modern Art. The painting appears sideways in Lawler's image, lending vulnerability to Richter's canvas. We can almost see the nude without its painting—as a nude, but not a Richter nude. *Nude* is potent for all the ways the singular object of Richter's work is diminished by Lawler's treatment.

Does *Four Nudes* in turn lessen *Nude*? Lawler places herself and her imagery squarely on the side of reception—on the side of the receiver, of communities of viewers, readers, and users of her work. In this sense she commits herself to work “on time”—her locution for “now”—thus making the present into the contingent aesthetic and sociohistorical material of her art.<sup>18</sup> “My reservations [about doing an interview] are about wanting to foreground the work and not the artist. The work works in the process of its reception,” Lawler told Crimp in a conversation in 2001.<sup>19</sup> “I don't want the work to be accompanied by anything that doesn't accompany it in the real world.”<sup>20</sup> I can't help but discern in *Four Nudes* the elaboration of emotional content, a self-conscious fragment of female experience and of gendered labor. Such questions of knowledge and culture, selfhood and identity, sexuality and sexual positioning in Lawler's work form part of a feminist tradition of critical stances toward knowledge, that of disobedience toward the symbolic order.<sup>21</sup> De Lauretis has provided a description of feminist consciousness that lights an awareness of the female voice and of interfemale positions, casting artistic genealogy as an analogue for real-world relations: “The conceptual and discursive space of a female genealogy can effectively mediate a woman's relation to the symbolic, allowing her self-definition as female being, or female-gendered speaking subject. And lest it be misconstrued, let me anticipate right away that this notion of genealogy is not limited to literary figures but reaches into relationships between women and everyday life.”<sup>22</sup> Contrary to the critical emphasis on the linguistic and symbolic readings of Lawler's work, I want to argue that Lawler does not limit her looking and recording to the symbolic—not wanting “anything that doesn't accompany [the work] in the real world.”

Language has something closer to a negative function in Lawler's practice: with the artist's almost total absence of interviews or explanation comes a virtual absence of a stable or unified author speaking about or trying to write boundaries around her objects and images—a relational and feedback-loop-like, other-focused author. Still, there can be no real separation between the two modes of language and the nonverbal. Lawler does not treat receiving—which for her includes interpretation by and through

everyday theory, individual viewers, and reception in any of its other forms—as existing apart from art, from her ideas and imagery. Language joins and divides Lawler's visual activity, beside, within, and outside it: “No drinks for those who do not support the anti-war demonstration” (page 172) reads an announcement card she made for the Metro Pictures exhibition in 2003. For another show at the gallery, Lawler created wrapping paper with edges printed with the texts “25 million for Osama,” “50 million for Bush,” “10 million for 2 Chechens,” and “20 million for Putin” (fig. 4).<sup>23</sup> In 2006, as part of a retrospective exhibition at the Wexner Center for the Arts, in Columbus, Ohio, Lawler created *Please Pay Attention*, a work that used *Twice Untitled* (2004/2005/2006, page 180), enlarged and cropped to fit the museum's wall in the form of a vinyl mural. Viewers were encouraged to take a printed paper slip with a link to “There Is Fascism, Indeed,” an article by Keith Olbermann of MSNBC.<sup>24</sup> In *No Official Estimate* (*Sun/Sol*) (2004/2007, fig. 5), another example of the gallery wall used as communication device, Lawler combined six identical silver dye bleach prints with printed vinyl text about the number of Iraqi civilians killed in the war, as reported by various sources.

The phrase “No drones” has functioned as an extended example of the artist's combined visual and linguistic modes. Between 2011 and 2017 Lawler produced no less than eight solo exhibitions titled *No Drones*, three of which included posters emblazoned with the phrase. During the same period she submitted other works titled *No Drones* to multiple group exhibitions. Thus different works and mediums use the same image and phrase, starting with a mounted chromogenic color print of *No Drones* (2010/2011) and a vinyl version, *No Drones (adjusted to fit)* (2010/2011, pages 206–7). In *Artforum* magazine in 2013 Lawler presented *A Portfolio (traced)*, a set of tracings that included the “No drones” text. The serial use is pointed, and partly the point. The aesthetic variations of “No drones” were not limited to two dimensions: Lawler produced an edition of drinking glasses printed with the phrase (2013, page 200), and a pair of them was featured on the cover of *Springerin* magazine in 2015 (page 220); this photograph was subsequently titled (*Beer*) (2013/2015). The phrase also appears on a security-tint envelope as part of *A Letter Always Arrives at Its Destination* (2014, page 201), and on the occasion of *Louise Lawler: Adjusted*, her solo exhibition at Museum Ludwig, in Cologne, she inscribed it on the museum's admission tickets and on a printed coloring book available in the gift shop.

“No drones” is a speech act lodged into various productions, some of them commonly commercial (magazines, drinking glasses, and coloring book). Her recent works, such as her “adjusted to fit”

works and her tracings, exist in various editions. In the case of the tracings, all have been given the same price, although only half of the editions are limited. The information inside and outside Lawler's photographic practice that couples the popular and everyday with knowledge of a more specialized, more field-specific kind creates a context for thinking about difference and identity. Such division of meaning, produced in a divisible identity of permeable parts, calls forth inner and outer worlds and questions the hierarchies of bounded authorship. On the changing conditions of photography, the artist Josephine Pryde has asserted that “perpetual recording” is “a part of the very fiber of our lived universe” and this condition, along with “the smartness of technical devices,” represents a freeing (her verb) of “the human eye and mind to operate in new registers.”<sup>25</sup> The art historian Birgit Pelzer has shown how such recording, with its features of segmenting and cataloguing, is essential to Lawler's photographic activity: “Continuing to be shown not as isolated works, but always in their context as statement, in their relationship to the venue, [Lawler's] photographs set out to get a fix on where mimesis and reciprocity are coming from. Taking literally photography's specificity as a medium that registers by dividing, Lawler itemizes and cuts her way toward pointing up some imperceptible turnaround point.”<sup>26</sup> Pelzer's notion of divisible (photographic) identity pries open the distinction between Lawler's camera-based art and critical discourse about the meaning of her work. Seeing and knowing are twined, just as they are in knowledge transmission in the real world, subject to various forms of translation through circulation, subject to the elasticity and distortions of time (and literal “adjustment”), subject to affective response.

In this sense, the partial and even dependent qualities of Lawler's images constitute their very power. In her photograph, taken in 2000, of a project that Michael Asher conceived and realized in 1978 for Elyse and Stanley Grinstein in Los Angeles, Lawler's labor seems to align closely with Asher's (fig. 6). Asher's idea was to remove a section of the perimeter wall on the southeast side of the Grinsteins' property and rebuild it 11 inches (27.9 centimeters) away from its original position, thereby expanding their neighbor's lot. The work centers on the role of such a wall (using the existent qualities of the wall, including its construction: concrete stucco with painted surface and structural columns) in delineating land and property lines and in demarcating the interconnected private and public zones between street, street access, and private home ownership. In conceiving the piece Asher had meditated on this public access aspect through the specifics of parking and parking regulations in and around the location of the Grinsteins' home. His drawings lay out how the corners of the new



18. See note 2.

19. Lawler, in “Prominence Given, Authority Taken,” p. 72.

20. Ibid.

21. This sense of feminist disobedience is palpable in an essay by Rosalyn Deutsche and as a method throughout the book it was written for. Deutsche, “Louise Lawler's Rude Museum,” in Helen Molesworth, ed., *Twice Untitled and Other Pictures* (looking back) (Columbus, Ohio: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2006), pp. 123–32.

22. De Lauretis, “The Practice of Sexual Difference and Feminist Thought in Italy,” pp. 1–21. See also the similar vantage point of Ann Goldstein, “In the

Company of Others,” in Molesworth, ed., *Twice Untitled and Other Pictures*, pp. 133–42.

23. This exhibition was *Looking Forward*, Metro Pictures, New York, October 30–December 2, 2004.

24. Keith Olbermann's article was a transcript from the August 30, 2006, broadcast of his MSNBC program *Countdown*. Olbermann's editorial, in the “Special Comment” section of his show, discussed a speech by Donald Rumsfeld in which Rumsfeld had said that critics of the Bush administration suffered from “moral or intellectual confusion”; it was posted the night of the broadcast to the anchor's MSNBC

blog under the title “Feeling Morally, Intellectually Confused?” The text was then picked up by the liberal website truth-out.org, where it was reposted on August 31, 2006 under the title “There Is Fascism, Indeed.” See nbcnews.com/id/6210240 and truth-out.org/archive/component/k2/item/65193:keith-olbermann--there-is-fascism-indeed.

25. Josephine Pryde, in “The New Look: Art and Fashion Photography,” *Artforum* 54, no. 9 (May 2016): 295. See Lütticken's remarks on morphing and iterations within Lawler's practice and from analog to digital, in Lütticken, “‘Not Stone’: Acting in and with Louise Lawler's Pictures,” in Kaiser, ed., *Louise Lawler: Adjusted*, pp. 135–36.

26. Birgit Pelzer, “Interpositions: The Work of Louise Lawler,” in Kaiser, ed., *Louise Lawler and Others*, pp. 19–34.

Fig. 4 Wrapping paper produced for *Looking Forward*, Metro Pictures, New York, October 30–December 23, 2004. Printed paper, folded: 12 × 12 in. (30.5 × 30.5 cm)  
Fig. 5 *No Official Estimate* (*Sun/Sol*). 2004/2007. Six silver dye bleach prints (one shown) with text on wall, each image: 39% × 29% in. (100.6 × 75.2 cm); wall text: 650,000 / 56,640–62,362 / 654,965 / 34,452 / 30,000 [Different calculations for Iraqi civilian deaths as reported by various media outlets in 2006 and 2007]



wall section meet the old straight line of the wall, at the edge of the column cap; Lawler's photograph shows the no longer linear, now parallel, built-out stucco wall from the Grinsteins' side. Trees and other plants fill the top and bottom of the photograph, as they filled the space above the wall and grow at its bottom edge.

The totality of the artwork—the change in the wall's positioning—has continued to live as an idea and as something that can be experienced directly from both the Grinsteins' and their neighbor's residences, and from Lawler's photograph. Her image is a record of one such angle of experience, the existence of which as an image, in its framing of Asher's moved wall section as a still image, imbues the wall with new aspects. Her choice of which side to shoot, for example, a simple-seeming decision, halves the real wall, concealing its other side. The qualities of imaging and watching, and how photographs record these acts, are even more significant, lending the new visualities of the 2000s to the traditional visual manifestations of private property and access. Asher had pointed to visibility in a different way with his no-new-objects medium, in his decisions to blend and normalize the moved wall's appearance by matching its stucco texture and paint color.<sup>27</sup> Lawler's photograph also gives Asher's very site-specific project the potential to circulate.

I want to make a counterpoint of the exhibition *Cameron Rowland: 91020000*. In 2015 Rowland worked with Artists Space to register the organization, eligible by virtue of its nonprofit status, as a purchaser from Corcraft, the market name for the New York State Corrections and Community Supervision, Department of Industries; this registration constitutes Rowland's work *Partnership* (2016). Corcraft items are manufactured by prison inmates and sold to New York state governmental entities and nonprofits at prices below market rate. In New York state, inmates are currently paid \$0.10 to \$1.14 per hour, wages that Rowland published in a pamphlet he wrote to accompany the project.<sup>28</sup> Artists Space, acting as Rowland's collaborator or on his behalf, purchased certain products from Corcraft. In the spring of 2016 Rowland presented a grouping of Corcraft objects in Artists Space's galleries in a simple and direct manner: four armless oak benches built by inmates at Green Haven Correctional Facility and used in New York state courtrooms (page 230); a steel and particleboard desk, built at Attica Correctional Facility and used in state government offices; and several cast-aluminum manhole leveler rings on a pallet made at Elmira Correctional Facility and used on public roads.<sup>29</sup> Another such item, two different pairs of Nomex fire suits, was obtained through a partnership between the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts at California College of the Arts and the California Prison Industry Authority, the distributor of goods manufactured by inmates in that state (fig. 7).



Fig. 6 Michael Asher's project for Elyse and Stanley Grinstein, Los Angeles, 1978. Photograph by Louise Lawler, 2000

Fig. 7 Installation view of *Cameron Rowland: 91020000*, Artists Space, New York, January 17–March 13, 2016. Work shown: *1st Defense NFPA 1977, 2011*. 2016. Nomex fire suit, distributed by CALPIA. 50 x 13 x 8 in. (38.1 x 33 x 20.3 cm)

27. The research in this section is based on Michael Asher's project folders. Michael Asher, box 10, folders 6 and 7, Grinstein Collection (also known as Property Line), 1978, Michael Asher Foundation, Los Angeles. I have been influenced by the groundbreaking essay Fraser wrote about Asher's practice, "Procedural Matters: The Art of Michael Asher," *Artforum* 46, no. 10 (Summer 2008): 374–81.

28. Cameron Rowland, pamphlet for *Cameron Rowland: 91020000*, Artists Space, New York, January 17–March 13, 2016, p. 4.

29. Rowland, captions for *Attica Series Desk, Leveler (Extension) Rings for*

*Manhole Openings*, and *New York State Unified Court System*, *ibid.*, pp. 6–7. All works 2016.

Within the installation, among the goods manufactured by inmates, Rowland situated objects intensely freighted with the economic legacy of slavery in the United States.<sup>30</sup> These included membership badges—pot-metal objects that are rare relics of the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association, founded in 1898, which advocated for pensions for former slaves; these badges were recovered from Civil War burial sites and are now valued as war relics. Three sets of container-lashing bars were also included in Rowland's grouping of objects. The bars are currently used to secure containers to the decks of ships and were inspected by Lloyd's Register, a dominant classification society formed in 1760 to inspect boats and equipment in order to more accurately price insurance policies for companies such as Lloyd's of London; among the boats in their purview were those used in the slave trade.<sup>31</sup> Finally, a purpose trust consisting of a ten-thousand-dollar investment in Aetna—which had issued insurance policies to slaveholders for the lives of slaves—was established by Rowland and Artists Space, and the trust document was presented in the exhibition. Rowland stipulated that the trust only be dissolved if the federal government paid financial reparations to the descendants of slaves, at which point the holdings would be transferred to the federal agency charged with distributions.<sup>32</sup> Using the primary tool of intergenerational wealth, the trust measures a continued deferral through Aetna's growth.<sup>33</sup>

Rowland's understanding of deferral calls upon a discourse of the subjectivity of negativity, which shows the colonizing notion of value attached to goods generated for purchase through the labor of people who are incarcerated to be just that: an economic advantage taken within a systemic situation of racialized value. These are dynamics we come closer to witnessing with the Corcraft objects, these things circulated by the state out of a system of incarceration (savings being only one among various economic rationales).<sup>34</sup> Asher, I will speculate, with his movement of the perimeter wall that subtracts from the Grinsteins' ground footprint, was after a roughly parallel inquiry about how the value of an artwork transfers and where this positions the artist. How were the neighbors going to respond to their "gain" in a small piece of ground—as more land but also more yard to tend to—as an idea within contemporary art, as a work that had been produced and sold, a triangle of transactions among these parties? Would the Grinsteins remain the sole owners of the Asher work in the event of their house being sold in the future to another owner or owners, to new owners of the wall?<sup>35</sup> Would the Asher (the artwork, not the wall) then have two owners?<sup>36</sup> Rowland's pamphlet presented captions for the objects that included the designation "rental at

30. The 2015 National Correctional Industries Association (NCIA) Directory—an annual listing of prison-industry programs—along with the purpose trust document for ten thousand dollars of stock in Aetna, comprised the show's discrete text pieces. It should be mentioned that the objects in Rowland's project are accompanied by short pieces of writing by the artist, which Rowland calls "captions," and these are part of the piece, meant for inclusion in exhibitions and publications. At Artists Space the captions appeared in a printed pamphlet.

31. Rowland, e-mail to the author, July 5, 2016.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. Rowland, Artists Space pamphlet, p. 4.

35. This question summarizes questions found in Asher's notes. Asher, box 10, folder 6, Grinstein Collection (also known as Property Line), 1978, Michael Asher Foundation, Los Angeles.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Rowland, telephone conversation with the author, June 2, 2016. The viewer holds this rental status in mind together with the knowledge of Artist Space's having registered as a Corcraft purchaser and together with the data of the NCIA Directory.

cost": the artist stipulated that the objects made by inmates were available only for rental, at their original purchase cost, for a five-year period (renewable). The conditions under which the objects in Rowland's exhibition might now be (re)sold or under which the trust will continue to exist take up ideas of continuing circulation and future events, such as a change in the government's policy on reparations or in the tactics of reparations law.<sup>37</sup>

Lawler's process of observation, a type of materialism, spurs pressurized critical reflections that are imbued with distance, although not the distance created by the passage of time—not as it is usually practiced by art historians, anyway. Her "no drones" polemic and listing of Iraqi civilian deaths, together with Rowland's questioning of so-called savings, reparations, and "people in prison as part of a nexus of government economic interests," and Asher's real-life offset wall section and his relationship and transaction with the Grinsteins—perhaps these conceptual contingencies are what Lawler means when she speaks of work that is made and experienced "on time": work that conceives of history and social life in collective and ongoing (back-and-forth) temporalities.<sup>38</sup> The precedents for this notion are found in feminist and political art from as far back as the 1970s, in works that resist the standard, received notions of cultural competency and interrogate social relations via images, objects, and other mediums that suggest alternative competencies and emphasize discrepancies of labor, community, and visibility.

To view and write about Lawler's works is to model a kind of experiencing of objects from a sideways, empirical view, to take a wide-open position with regard to seeing and being seen, and to photographs, objects, contexts, circumstances, or other viewers.<sup>39</sup> This position beside eschews assurances, eschews the old authority issuing from a singular, unified, self-contained artist-author, and this experience—this type of skepticism, with its forthright implications and exposures—elicits discomfort and awkward fragmentation.<sup>40</sup> Lawler's attentiveness to art and images in social life, and our attentiveness to hers, is not proprietary or possessive, not whole, not like language, not cheap, not competitive, not violent—even though art and art viewing carry all of this baggage, all of this history of savings and damage, all of the objects and object relations we embody in private and public. To live with and continue after Lawler's decades-long work in reception as precedent and self-awareness, with the ways she materializes this in image and form, is to cohabit with the eye and mind in a messier and far more contingent situation: to reflect without needing to document (or explicate) in the old sense any longer.

38. Rowland, Artists Space pamphlet, p. 3.

39. A critical book on experience and empiricism as terms about learning and praxis is Molly Nesbit, *The Pragmatism in the History of Art* (Pittsburgh: Periscope, 2013).

40. My use of "beside" is indebted to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).