

JADE WALKER

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*WAYFINDING*



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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JANUARY 7 - FEBRUARY 23, 2023

AUSTIN, TEXAS

## WAYFINDING

The sculptures populate<sup>1</sup>, press up against<sup>2</sup>, and wrap around<sup>3</sup> the room<sup>4</sup>. The walls are used as a support, the awareness of which is marked by a thorn. *Wayfinding* considers the possibility that getting lost is a prerequisite to place-making.

Emily Lee is an artist, writer, and curator based in Austin, TX.

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[1] An industrial-trash-can-sized bundle of rusted barbed wire secured to the wall by taut orange twine dangles off the edge of a powder blue floating wall. It rests against the wall while a two-by-four props it up. It's hard to tell if the bundle could stay up there if one were to remove either the twine or the two-by-four, but it seems like neither of them could alone lift the bundle. All around this corner, little sculptural moments sit on the wall or nearby on the floor. Almost miniature in relation to that unavoidable bundle dangling above them, they appear to have been made by stacking and stuffing materials onto and into one another—thin plastic baskets, bones, glass jars, wood, string, a mitten, some teeth, maybe. “Moment” is a concession. It's a word that functions here as an attempt to describe the installation in parts when it's clear that the whole installation operates as a single system, not a set of discrete objects. Experientially, it resonates as a single entity, and the need to separate only comes into play when attempting to use language to describe the exhibition. It's not only that I become skeptical towards my tendency to delineate between discrete sculptural forms; it's more that the utility of separateness doesn't apply here. In fact, it only makes sense to refer to Jade Walker as a sculptor if we expand the definition of sculpting beyond the tendency to account only for just the material itself. The lack of traditional labels, the unusual choice to post the exhibition title in the rear left of the gallery space, and the use of the gallery's architecture as an armature show that Walker has opted out of normative efforts to delineate and make sense of things. The empty space between objects has consequence insofar as it is charged by the way one moment is altered by its neighbor.

[2] Further in, large-scale ladder-forms, mallets, and crutches lean against the wall. The ladders have been refashioned into sorts of looms holding hotly colored yarn and hay-baling twine. Strung between the rungs of the ladders, the woven materials fill up and block the empty space where a climber's feet or hands would go. The mallet and crutch follow the logic of inert tools as well, scaled up to the size of architecture, overgrown with yarn. What feels like an act of connection— weaving, or tying disparate strands into one cohesive textile—operates here like an act of disconnection—something that blocks my own imagined participation in the tool. Ladders leaning on walls are stable to climb up, but when the climb-ability of the ladder is taken away, the ladder's potentiality becomes inert; its leaning reads more as its dependence on the wall. When pressed up against, the walls become active as sculptural components, and what we consider “the work” begins to expand across the room itself. And with this kind of scale at play, it's even conceivable to shrink my own perspective, to imagine the possibility that the yarn has not blocked the ladder but is itself climbing it, like a kind of ivy weed. There is sculptural information at any scale—the scale of the architecture itself, or the scale of beads tucked into cotton balls wadded up in a mason jar set inside a plastic container sitting on a little shelf. Things fall into the periphery or are hidden by the objects that obscure the clarity of getting to see everything. As Nan Shepherd said in *The Living Mountain*, a book integral to Walker's conceptualization of this exhibit, “The true mark of a long acquaintance with a single place is a readiness to accept uncertainty. You must not seek complete knowledge.”

[3] One can see the evidence of how everything ended up where it's located in the room. Objects are pinned to, propped up against, and wrapped around the gallery architecture in a way that displays the gestures of their making. I can imagine the artist carrying these smaller objects in her hands and stuffing them into other, larger objects. I can see the efficiency of a bundle of twine that's been used to take up as much space as possible. The center of the exhibition features a floating wall set behind and two poles, all clearly belonging to the gallery's infrastructure. Incorporating these architectural elements as constitutive parts of the sculptural work itself, Walker weaves a porous hallway out of the forms with twine strung from the leftmost pole, around the backside of the floating wall, and around the rightmost pole. Like the ladder-forms, open space is delineated, even sectioned off, by weaving. From the front, it almost looks as though the wall that is being cradled by the twine is set up to be ejected out of the room in the slingshot-like arrangement. The mobility this implies, however, is tempered by what I find as I round the corner—a shadowy heap of objects like plastic toys, trash, and rope that have seemingly been tossed into an opening made by the circling the twine around a column behind the wall, caged behind tense strings like bouncy balls for sale in a grocery store. Here, carving, weaving, stuffing, and tossing a kid's play car over the top of a twine fence are all acts of sculpting. And while it's easy to make a binary out of the materials Walker works with (some elements are extreme examples of the artist's delicate handiwork, while other elements are seemingly plucked from detritus of an average life in a consumer society and literally tossed into form) it doesn't feel like such a conscious choice as a viewer standing amongst these materials. Instead, the broad spectrum of material value here is more likely the product of Walker's engagement with and use of the place that surrounds her as she makes things, made evident in the work's insistence that a Kong-brand dog toy is as quintessential a component of her environment as petrified wood. This reminds me of an excerpt from the book *Landmarks* by Robert Macfarlane, which is included in a basket at the front of the gallery. He describes the etymology of the word landmark, which comes “from the Old English landmearc, meaning ‘an object in the landscape which,





*Orrels, Gobals + Thrums, 2023*

Found nest, plastic container, thread, baskets, yarn, bucket, wood, weave, knit, embroidery, found tools, sticks, rope, barbed wire, foam, tape, plastic, dimensions vary

Cover Panel: *Wayfinding, 2023*, installation view

by its conspicuousness, serves as a guide in the direction of one's course.” Landmarks aren't native to the landscape—they serve the function of orienting our perception and sense of direction. Like a landmark, these works don't quite end or begin. Their edges ramble, tied up into one another or into the architecture itself. And like Macfarlane's landmeare, these works choreograph my own body around the space in distinct ways. Whatever sense of arrival one may feel when approaching a work of art is mellowed by the awareness of ways in which this work is entangled with the piece that came before it. While the precisely coiled and delicately strung works here are clearly labor-intensive, Walker's artistic authorship doesn't lie mainly in the objects themselves. She has instead created the feeling of place by carefully composing the layout and display of the exhibition of radically provisional sculptures relating across space. In fact, many of the works inside have components which have been repurposed from other works, or which have been made by the artist's children.

[4] The entire room is painted blue. When we imagine the act of painting a room, we may envision standing inside the room and painting a thin layer of blue on the walls that surround us. We may view this as a decorative choice, but Walker's relationship to wall paint presents a different dynamic. Throughout her works, the artist almost always paints the walls of the exhibition space. If we try to see *Wayfinding* as a single installation rather than a set of discrete works, the wall becomes an important boundary within which the work and its material logic is set loose. Like weaving, the act of painting the walls is akin to the act of touching, and by touching the entire boundary of the exhibition with paint, Walker effectively draws a circle around the works, prompting the installation to function as a single whole separated from the world outside the exhibition. But from inside the space, I imagine this horizontal blue band around the room as an expansion: a vast blue sky stretched over a horizon line. It reminds me of what I visualized when Walker described the rural North Texas property where she and her family returned to during Covid. There, she learned about the local ecology and familiarized herself with tactics useful while living off the grid. This is the property from which Walker scavenged much of the materials in this exhibition, including honey locust thorns which, before she learned to avoid them, Walker would find stuck deep through the sole of her shoe. *Wayfinding*, which uses the thorns as pins upon which to hang artworks, shows the landscape's antagonists to be functional, even integral. I can imagine that the thorns in Walker's shoe were regarded similarly, with reverence towards the important role they play in forming relationships between the desert and its visitors.



*Orrels, Gobals + Thrums, 2023, detail*



# Jade Walker

## EDUCATION

- 2005 MFA, Sculpture, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX  
2000 BFA, Sculpture, The University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

## SELECTED SOLO AND TWO PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 *Migration*, Arts Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX  
(Two-person exhibition)  
2021 *Reweaving: 2021*, Elisabet Ney Museum, Austin, TX  
*Mire + Mend*, ArtResponders: City of Austin Public Arts Project  
Austin, TX  
*The Bartlett Project*, Bartlett, TX, curated by Leslie Moody Castro  
*NOT*, The Pylon Project, Big Medium at Canopy, Austin, TX  
2020 *In the Arc of Your Mallet*, Dimension Gallery, Austin, TX  
2019 *Heartfelt*, The Museum of Pocket Art, Austin, TX  
*Little Soldiers*, Dimension Gallery, Austin, TX  
2016 *Four Cornered*, Texas State Galleries, San Marcos, TX  
2012 *CONTACT*, Lawndale Art Center, Houston, TX  
2011 *Texas Biennial: Jade Walker*, Contemporary at Blue Star,  
San Antonio, TX, curated by Virginia Rutledge  
2010 *Spectator Sport*, Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX,  
curated by Andrea Mellard  
2009 *Trophy Room*, Domy Books, Austin, TX  
2008 *Merriment*, Big Medium, Austin, TX  
2007 *Listening Room*, Elsewhere Living Museum, Greensboro, NC  
2005 *In the Home*, Project Room, Conduit Gallery, Dallas, TX  
2004 *Bare Minimum*, Safulak Art Gallery, Hsinchu, Taiwan

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 *Seasons of Fruition*, Dimension Gallery, Austin, TX  
2015 *Art on the Green Sculpture Invitational*, Kemp Art Center,  
Wichita Falls, TX, curated by Erin Cunningham  
2014 *A Catalogue*, Tiny Park, Austin, TX  
2013 *transFIGURATION*, Big Medium, Austin, TX, curated by Rino  
Pizzi  
*New and Greatest Hits: Texas Biennial 2005-2011*, Big Medium,  
Austin, TX, curated by Michael Duncan and Virginia Rutledge  
2012 *Sharing*, Fusebox Festival, Austin, TX  
*Temporal Figuration*, LVL3, Chicago, IL  
2011 *Texas Uprising: Selections from the Texas Sculpture Group Part  
Two*, Blue Star Contemporary Art Center, San Antonio, TX  
2010 *3rd Coast National*, K Space Contemporary, Corpus Christi, TX,  
juried by Trenton Doyle Hancock  
2009 *Faculty Exhibition*, Creative Research Laboratory, Austin, TX  
*Texas Biennial Group Exhibition*, Sites across Austin, TX,  
juried by Michael Duncan  
*The People's Gallery*, Austin City Hall, Austin, TX  
2008 *Hasta La Basura Se Separa (Even The Trash Separates Itself)*,  
Centro Cultural de Nuevo Laredo, Nuevo Laredo, Mexico  
*New American Talent: 23*, Arthouse at the Jones Center, Austin, TX,  
juried by Nato Thompson

## AWARDS AND GRANTS

- 2018 Community Initiatives Grant, City of Austin, TX  
2016 Visual Artist of the Year, Critics Round Table Awards, Austin, TX  
2005 Dedalus Foundation nominee

## RESIDENCIES

- 2020 Facebook AIR Program, Austin, TX  
2007 Elsewhere Artist Collaborative, Greensboro, NC  
2006 Artist in Residence at Webb School, Knoxville, TN  
2004 Safulak Art Village, Hsinchu, Taiwan  
1999 Penland School of Art, Penland, NC

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Miller Imaging and Digital Solutions, The Payne Family, Annette Carlozzi,  
Ann Reynolds, Andrea Mellard, Philip Townsend, Emily Lee, Robin Williams,  
Sarah Bancroft, Jared Steffensen, Anastasia Colombo, the dynamo team at  
Women & Their Work, and volunteers who worked on *Human Geography*: Chantal  
Lesley, Maira Carmona, Jeannie McKetta, and Sarah Luna



*Human Geography, 2023*

Collected man made materials including: plastic baskets, bins, baling cord, water tanks, fire tanks, processed wood, natural material including cedar, juniper thorn, pine, dimensions vary



*Nieve (one), 2023*  
Rope, found objects, plastic, zip ties, metal ring, 24 x 24 x 12"

## WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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*Photographs by Hector Tednoir Martinez*

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Women & Their Work is a visual and performing arts organization located in Austin that serves as a catalyst for new ideas in contemporary art. Since 1978, Women & Their Work has created significant opportunities for artists and audiences to experience contemporary art through ambitious exhibitions, commissions of new work, performances and programs that inform audiences of all ages. We have actively developed the careers of more than 1,900 women artists, presenting 332 visual art exhibitions, 161 music, dance and theater events, 30 spoken word and literary performances, 16 film festivals and 787 programs & education workshops with the goal of ensuring that diverse women artists are equitably represented in all forms of art. Women & Their Work helps meet an important need in Texas providing exhibition and performance opportunities and helping to attract critical attention to the work produced here; it is the only organization of its kind in the region and one of the few organizations in

the United States that dedicates itself to the work of women artists. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *The New York Times*, *ArtForum*, and on *National Public Radio* and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2020, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art acquired the 42-year archive of Women & Their Work ensuring that our entire history of the work of women artists and our website will be preserved in perpetuity.



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*Andy Warhol*

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