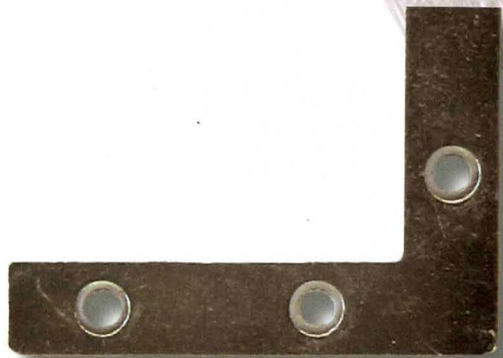


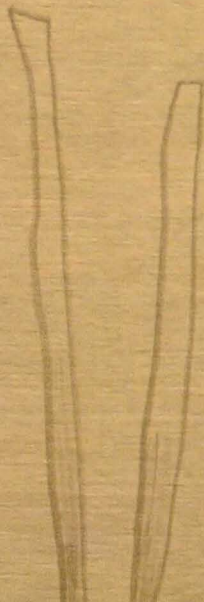
ALLISON WADE:
conduits &
offerings

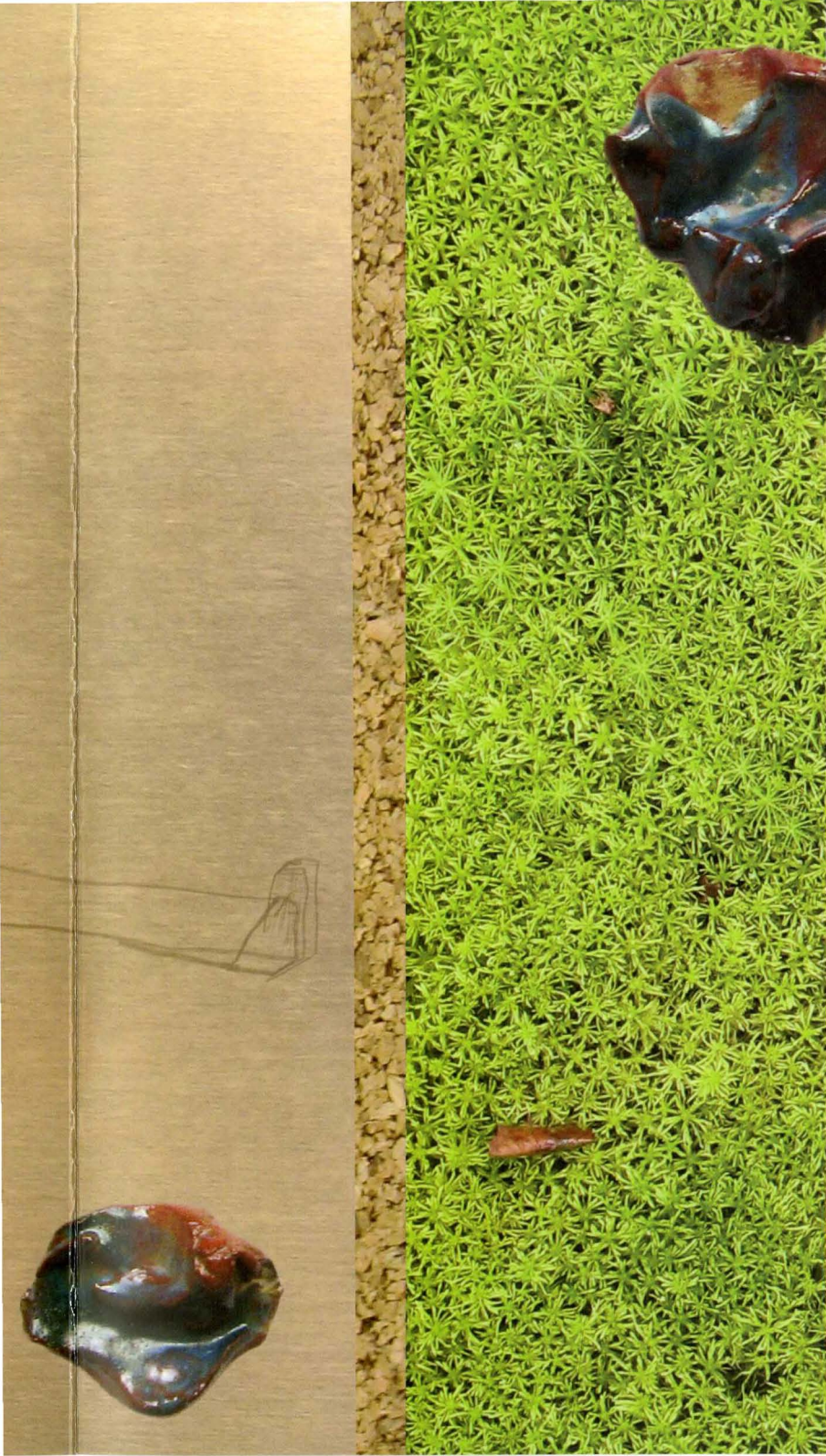
october 25 to december 4, 2013
clough-hanson gallery
rhodes college
memphis, tennessee



Rhodes College
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Allison Wade:
Conduits and Offerings

Clough-Hanson Gallery
at Rhodes College
10/25/13 – 12/4/13

As I consider how I'll convey some idea of Allison Wade's work to you, I'm compelled to dispense with any notion of professional distance. I'm sure this is partly because of my relationship with Allison; she is my friend and mentor (though she might dispute the latter descriptor, it is as unequivocally true as the former). It's also because the vulnerability that Wade enacts through her drawings and sculptures renders a third-person, intellectual-rational response somewhat hollow, maybe even false. In the tight economy of Allison's work, there's not a spare word to hide behind. And so, in what I believe to be the spirit of the work, at the risk of breaching the boundary of the professional, I'll choose to indulge here in the excesses of the personal.

It's fitting that this show directs me to reconsider the conventions of language and their affective potential. Allison and I have spoken often about her background in English literature and

her interest in conjunctions, portmanteau, and parataxis, which means placing sentences, clauses, or phrases together without using conjunctive words. For example, *Hang on, Allison. I need a minute. Let me look that up.* This interest appears in the deliberate and specific ways in which she chooses and configures her materials. The familiarity of textiles balances the austerity of chain. The flesh of clay meets the bones of metal. Found pieces, which are often blunt and kind of stupid (in a great way), are combined with sensitively crafted elements that clearly bear the mark of Allison's hand. I read all of these parts as I would a word, a sentence or a paragraph, with each unit modifying, shaping, and relying on the units around it. With Allison's work, as with writing, points of connection become incredibly important. They take on immense gravity, tiny suns around which the other elements orbit.

Allison's extraordinary ability to think visually makes the language of her work elegant and clear; I understand with both my body and my mind the tension of a bent wire held in check by the weight of a log. The *affect* of such a configuration is less easy to pin down. Why, standing here in front of this

sculpture, am I suddenly made aware of the imbalance of emotional dependence between my partner and I? Is that fair to him, or me? Why haven't I called my mother lately? How is it that this bent wire and this dumb log are breaking my heart? Allison works as if she somehow knows the syntax of emotion and the grammar of relationships. If her work became text itself, it might read like a romance novel written by Strunk and White.

One of my favorite things about Allison's work is that all of this is as tenuous as my own body. The work falls apart. It will absolutely mortify her that I'm telling you this, but it has happened before, even once during the opening reception for an exhibition, and it will probably happen again. This is not for lack of care or consideration. I wish you could watch Allison install a show. She attends to each piece with gentle twists and knowing nudges until every element contributes to the production and maintenance of an exquisite tension. She is known in some circles as the Sculpture Whisperer.

Despite all of this care, the sculptures will, at some point, fall. Tectonic plates will kiss somewhere under the Atlantic Ocean, the earth will shift one half of

one billionth of one degree on its axis, and the work will tumble. The dampness of your breath will find its way past your lips and tongue to the surface of that metal strap, beginning a tiny spot of rust that will eventually snap it in two, bringing the whole thing to the ground. Or, eager to get home to a waiting embrace, I might clumsily brush against a piece as I turn out the lights in the gallery this very evening, sending bits of ceramic and chain flying.

This is not a secret. Allison's work is absolutely honest about its own vulnerability; honest in a way that makes me jealous. I envy these configurations of ceramic and stumps, shredded jersey and chunks of pipe. I also empathize with them. I want to protect them in the way that I want to be protected. I will also break down, sooner and later, in more than a few ways. I will also fall apart. I will be honest about my needs. I will keep learning the language of relationships. I will let people in.

When all that these sculptures and I can do is simply stand, we'll keep standing, until we can't.

Joel Parsons
Director, Clough-Hanson Gallery