



10

Slow View: Molly Larkey

Slow View is an interview series centered on a single work. The aim is to generate thoughtful, in-depth conversation, and through this prolonged consideration provide an alternative to the quickness with which work is often viewed in our digital age. Last month Anna Breininger and Kate Whitlock joined L.A. based artist Molly Larkey in her studio to discuss her work *The Not Yet (Signals 1-7)* (2014). This wall-based work employs forms that reference written language to explore the slippery territory between communication and subjective experience.

Anna Breininger: I'm thinking about this project as developing an alphabet or a language, though not in a literal way. These seven pieces have been on view as an installation, but are in the studio now in a different configuration. Is it one piece? Or seven pieces? Or is the piece ongoing?

Molly Larkey: It's true that the idea of writing about just that one artwork becomes problematic when talking about this work. Each one is an individual piece, and the installation of seven was a piece, and the ongoing project of imagining a utopian alphabet is also a piece. I like the complication of the work existing in these different ways, also, the idea that this artwork

exists as a kind of concept that can never be realized. People often ask, "Wait, are you making an alphabet?" and I'm like, "No, I'm making something that pretends to be an alphabet that can *never* be an alphabet." An alphabet needs to be fixed and standardized. But with what I'm doing, there will never be replication of any of the individual works. It's not reproducible. This is a contradiction in terms, but what does that do? I think that it makes your brain do something that's really interesting. There are all of these contradictions, like, this is a wall sculpture that's a painting of a concept of an alphabet that can't exist.

AB: That's exactly the experience I had at your show at Luis De Jesus, which was all about slippage. There is a tension within the materials you are using. Steel is such a heavy, masculine, monumental material to work with. It's institutional. Then these steel forms get covered in a delicately painted burlap. In some ways you're functioning like a painter as you're dealing with these non-painterly elements.

ML: Yes, definitely. So for me, it's a reactive process where there is an improvisational relationship between me and the material, no matter what the material is. And it's significant that this particular type of steel is normally used to make fences, so that I'm taking something this would otherwise be used to divide and manage people's movement and instead using it to make structures that are open and

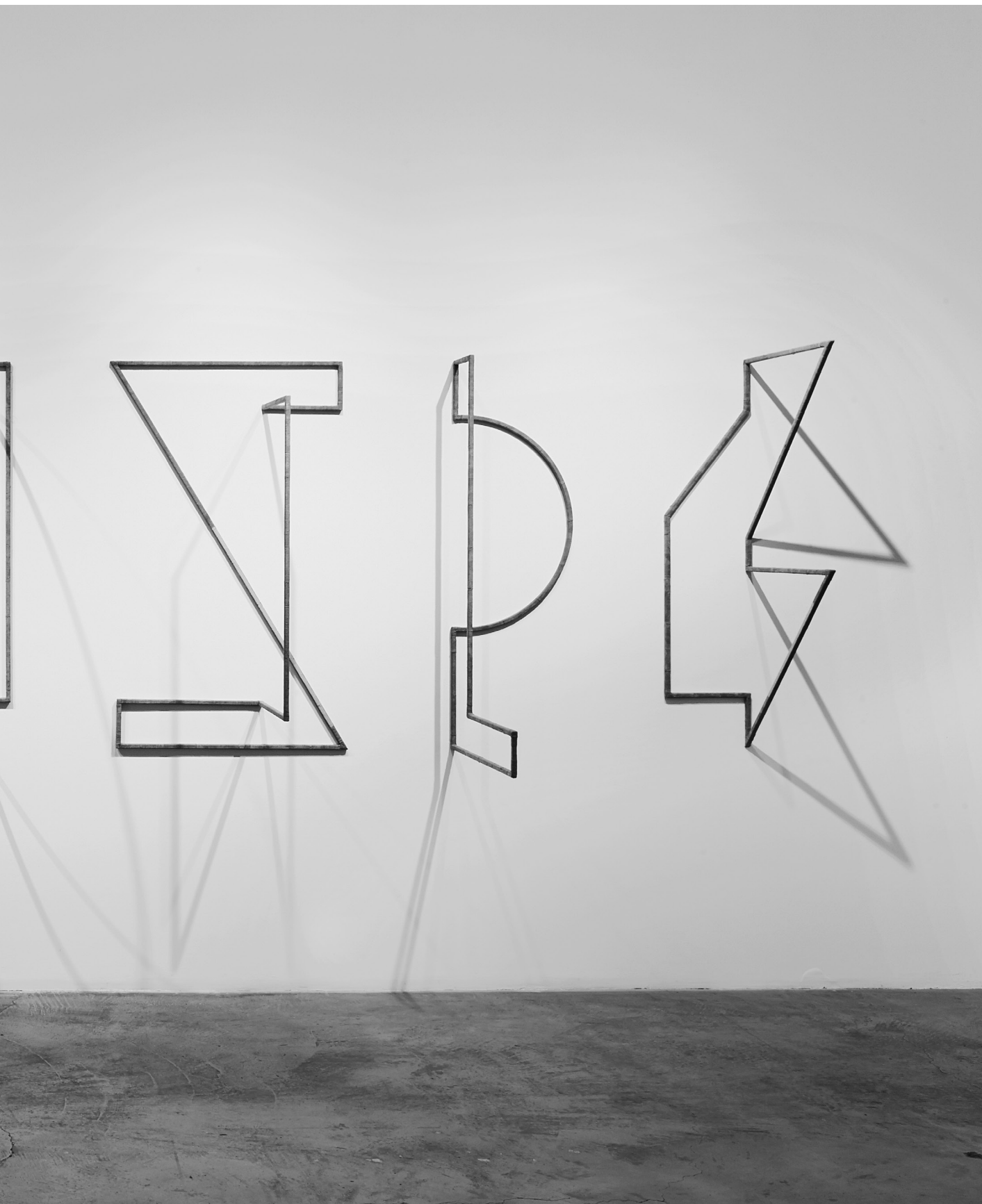
Anna Breininger was born in the '80s in rural Pennsylvania. In 2013 she received an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art. Currently she lives in Los Angeles where she maintains an active studio practice. She has exhibited in New York, Los Angeles and has been featured in *New American Paintings*.

Originally from Philadelphia, Kate studied at the Accademia Italiana in Florence, Italy and holds a BFA in painting from Arcadia University. In 2008 Kate landed in Los Angeles, served as a curatorial assistant for two years, and in 2010 became an Associate at McCall Art Advisory.

Anna Breininger

Kate Whitlock





dynamic. Also, I'm constantly thinking about the way that the masculine is being promoted and the feminine is being repressed pretty much everywhere in our culture. I think it's fair to say that metalworking is associated with masculinity, and working with fabric and craft is seen as feminine. My hope then, is to create a kind of reversal where the masculine is transformed by an intervention of the feminine. It's all about finding ways to transform something rigid or repressive into something that's fluid and allows for different kinds of movement and subjective interpretation.

AB: Language is an institutional medium in a similar way to painting, and the work feels like it's questioning the role of both. It's deliberately not fitting into any category. These pieces are objects on the wall, but the way that you're handling space, the way that you're drawing through space, adds another layer to them.

ML: I'm super excited by these confrontations with institutional categories, because it seems like another way to work with what's known and also seeing where something new can happen. Also, we have these different categories of identification to help us read things instantaneously and then we move on to the next thing. Our minds are moving so fast, we're barely allowed to focus on anything for more than a second. So when you complicate this, it can help slow you down.

AB: But the thing about painting is that it's so slow. It's like it takes a lifetime to complete. I mean, we could talk about the relationship between painting and technology and the artists who address that, but what I appreciate in your work is the deliberate slowness.

ML: Painting is definitely another way to slow down. You go into a museum and you're like, there's a painting! And you slow down, you become present with what is in front of you. Things then can speak to you in a different way than when you're scanning and reading. Reading is the metaphor for how we deal with everything: we read images, people, situations. My hope is that by contaminating the categories in the artwork, it affects how you read something, and it slows you down even more. Because you can't immediately read it, you have to be with it, instead of just scanning it. It's a different kind of awareness than we normally need in this world with all this symbolic meaning around us. I feel like there's art that does this, and it's my favorite kind of art, art that is—for lack of a better word—*ugly*. You see it and at first it reads as ugly, and then you slow down and something happens that is transformative, and it doesn't seem ugly anymore. But the transformation happens through the process of spending time with it.

AB: I feel like you're using the linguistic forms in your work in the same way that the art that you're talking about uses ugliness. When I looked at your work, I had the slowest, almost frustrating time thinking, "Am I reading this?" Initially I spent time trying to find a word or some sort of literal meaning in the work. The piece really coaxes time out of

Molly Larkey (b. 1971, Los Angeles) lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. She received a MFA from Rutgers University, New Jersey, and a BA from Columbia University, New York. Her work has been featured in exhibitions at PS1 MoMA, New York; The Saatchi Gallery, London; LACMA, Los Angeles; The Drawing Center, New York; Horton Gallery, New York; Ochi Gallery, Ketschum; Samson Projects, Boston; and Human Resources, Commonwealth & Council, Control Room, Post, and Weekend, all in Los Angeles.

Molly Larkey

you in that way. I wanted it to be something legible and I finally gave up and allowed the work to exist on its own terms.

Kate Whitlock: What about questioning where Western society went wrong when using the alphabet? The trajectory since the alphabet became commonplace led to drastic consequences. It was based on exclusivity: women weren't allowed to use the alphabet to read and write. Female experiences weren't documented. You, as a woman, commenting on a system that did not include women for so long speaks volumes.

ML: There's so much there. We're both are into *The Goddess vs. the Alphabet*. That book really made explicit for me that the alphabet suppresses feminine experience in so many ways, not only in the ways you just mentioned. It really added a lot to my understanding of why I was making this work. What was interesting is that my understanding of the feminine as being opposed to the alphabet was totally intuited until I read this book and had some concrete images for how that might have happened historically. People, mostly men of course, have always been interested in letters as mystical objects and deciphering them as god-like structures. People have always had this feeling that they're magic. I kind of feel like they are, but we've become immune to the magic through overexposure.

KW: They are magic in the way the alphabet creates linear time and history. You can go back and read what those men wrote. And that goes back to how we utilize the alphabet to communicate the past. The introduction of a written language made oral traditions more or less irrelevant.

ML: There was a guy who tried to write the entire bible in an alphabet, like one symbol contained an entire episode. That's sort of an interesting idea. If you could embody an entire experience in one symbol... that's a whole other inquiry... if you could tell a story through symbols, without defining them ahead of time.

KW: I wonder if it would ever be the same story.

ML: I'm really into that because it just throws you back into your own experiences and into your subjectivity. You can't access an "objective" sort of meaning or a universal meaning. And that's what was born with the alphabet: a kind of universal, or at least the possibility for universal literacy and communication. But what was lost was the local and the material—the subjective—like, this is an experience and it happens in this place and you have to be here to experience it. In a way, art occupies that space that was lost. A painting—or really any art—is like, "I'm telling you a story, there are no words for it, GO." Then the story becomes an internally created subjective experience. When I first started looking at art, having been totally focused on writing before, I had this revelation that art takes place in my body and language takes place in my head. Art gave me a physical sense of being in the world that language never had.

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Molly Larkey, *The Not Yet*
(*Signals 1-7*) (2014), acrylic
paint, linen, steel, dimensions
variable. Image courtesy
of the artist and Luis de Jesus
Los Angeles (Photo: Heather
Rasmussen).